

The BBC and Appeasement: Broadcast Coverage of Nazi Persecution
of the Jews, 1933-1938

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Statement of Proof:

As required by the Board of Graduate Studies at the University of Cambridge, I certify that the material in this dissertation is my own and the research carried out was conducted by myself. Where I have alluded to or referred directly to the work of others, it is cited accordingly.

2.1.1 13 JUNE 1997

Note on style and abbreviations

American spellings are used throughout the text unless an original quote. Thus, 'programs' when it is my reference but 'programmes' when it is in quotes or a title like 'director of programmes'. Also, my inserts in quotations appear in [brackets]. The inserts of the writer appear in (parentheses). Titles of individuals are capitalized only if they precede the name of the individual. Otherwise, they are in lower-case form.

FO	Foreign Office
FPO	Foreign Press Office
The Board	Board of Deputies of British Jews
RRG	Reichs Rundfunk Gesellschaft

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INTRODUCTION

Servant of God, well done, well hast thou fought
The Better fight, who singly hast maintained
Against revolted multitudes the cause
Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms.

John Milton

In the era of mass communication, the British Broadcasting Corporation retains an association with notions of truth, objectivity and acute news analysis. It is said that during periods of conflict or crisis, when the susceptibility to exaggeration often marks 'official' news content, those individuals caught up in the events, the educated and illiterate alike often ask one another, 'What did the BBC say?' ¹ For nearly three-quarters of the twentieth century, the BBC has provided news and information, variety and entertainment to both a British and an international audience. It is and has always been a peculiarly British institution, one which was not afraid to engage in 'democratic broadcasting' during the Second World War even at the risk of disrupting home morale, but also one which consistently struggled with its semi-independent identity.

Between 1933 and 1938, Nazi Germany engaged in the systematic persecution of its Jewish community with acts of increasing intensity. One would, therefore, expect the BBC to have reported extensively on these developments considering its association with hard-nosed journalism and critical news broadcasting. That this was not the case is in part explicable through the extent to which Broadcasting House, in direct and independent compliance with the diplomatic aims of the Foreign Office, was party to and a partner in the application of the policy of appeasement. There was a major discrepancy between the BBC's knowledge of what was happening in Nazi Germany and the Corporation's effort to disseminate that knowledge to any great extent. 'Negative' news about Nazi Germany was carefully controlled by the BBC during this period in order to ensure that 'sensitive' information was not widely distributed for public consumption. This is, however, only a partial explanation. British social and cultural attitudes towards Jews contributed to an environment in which fuller and more detailed information or comment about the anti-Jewish persecution was not broadcast because it was not a priority to do so. These were not only implicitly exemplified and reinforced by the broadcasting policy of the BBC, but must be seen as the principle reason for the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the realities of the events of the 1930s. News of anti-Jewish persecution was never considered a broadcast priority by the BBC and the issue of its dissemination was never a source of contention between the BBC and the Foreign Office. Appeasement may have

¹ Julian Hale, *Radio Power* (London, 1975), 48

restricted the BBC's broadcasting boundaries, but it was the socio-cultural phenomenon of latent British anti-Semitism, inherent in the Corporation itself, which unconsciously regulated news output during this period.

A brief chronological survey of 'major' and widely-publicized events (in the popular press and elsewhere) in Nazi Germany compared to its broadcast coverage on the BBC gives an indication of the editorial policy that largely ignored some fundamental features of the Nazi regime. From 1933 to 1938, there were at least forty stories dealing generally with Jews or Jewish issues either related or not to Nazi Germany. Among the more prominent events in pre-war Nazi Germany were the April 1 boycott of Jewish businesses in 1933, the Nuremberg laws of 15 September 1935 disenfranchising Jews, and the events of *Kristallnacht* on 9 November 1938. Out of these, the April boycott was discussed in two non-news bulletins but the tone of the discussion preferred to minimize the extent of the boycott.² The Nuremberg decrees were mentioned in one, brief news bulletin lasting no more than twenty seconds and devoted primarily to the Memel dispute.³ *Kristallnacht* was also mentioned in a news bulletin, without commentary and with few details. The report, surprisingly, provided far more detail than many other reports dealing with anti-Jewish persecution:

After the death of Herr vom Rath, the Secretary of the German Embassy in Paris, who was shot by a Polish Jew, a national campaign of anti-Jewish rioting and arson began throughout Germany on November 10. Nine out of eleven synagogues in Berlin were set on fire, and synagogues were destroyed in many other parts of the country. Shop windows throughout Germany were smashed and goods destroyed or looted, and many shops and restaurants were also set on fire [...] all damage done during the attacks on Jewish property would be made good by the Jews themselves, and that from the beginning of next year no Jews would be allowed to engage in retail trades, export, business, commercial affairs or independent handicraft businesses or to act as managers.⁴

As we shall see, a pattern of incomplete and misleading news regarding anti-Jewish persecution and presented by the BBC developed from the outset of the Nazi rise to power.

² for more on this report, see below pp. 72-73

³ for more on this report, see below pp. 67-68

⁴ BBC Scripts in the *Listener* (hereafter BBC Scripts), News Bulletin: 'Anti-Jewish rioting in Germany', 10 November 1938

I. Presenting a case

The story of how the BBC disseminated information about the condition of Jews in Germany during the prewar 1930s overlaps with the story of the Corporation's relationship with the Foreign Office and its reflection of wider British social values. Through a cooperative relationship forged between itself and the Foreign Office, the BBC may be seen as tacit partner in helping the state implement a policy of appeasement towards Germany. This relationship affected the way in which the BBC handled German news and, by extension, information about anti-Jewish persecution in Germany. News deemed 'negative', defined as such by the Foreign Office and eventually self-regulated by the BBC, was to be avoided after 1936. What is astonishing, however, was just how little information about anti-Jewish persecution was dispensed for broadcast before this time - three years after the introduction of anti-Semitism as official policy in Germany. Even fewer reports about anti-Jewish persecution would be broadcast after 1936. Why, then, was one of the defining features of pre-war Nazi Germany left largely ignored and critically neglected? Why was this issue never a broadcast priority? The evidence suggests that social and cultural perceptions towards Jews, which amounted to a latent anti-Semitism in Britain, is a partial explanation. Sympathy toward persecuted Jews neither resonated among the British public nor its 'great interpreter': the British Broadcasting Corporation. Both halves of the subsequent discussion pursue these independent, but interrelated issues. In the interest of clarity, sub-sections are arranged largely thematically and where practical, the issues are developed chronologically. Part one provides the contextual background necessary to understand the factors considered in the second half. Furthermore, any attempt to define the BBC's role in a 'conspiracy of ambivalence' requires a specific examination of the part played by the Foreign Office.

Part one deals with the BBC's indirect role in promoting the state's policy of appeasement. It is concerned with the Corporation's relationship with the Foreign Office and particularly, the Foreign Press Office (FPO). It traces the BBC's unofficial involvement in helping to mitigate increasing diplomatic instability between Great Britain and her neighbors, particularly Germany. This unofficial role found the Corporation

conforming to 'the general line' disseminated by the Foreign Office news department which resulted in tacitly approved, self-imposed censorship.⁵ By 1934, all manuscripts for broadcast were approved by the Foreign Office in an agreement forged between Foreign Office representatives and BBC Director-General John Reith, before their radio transmission. It is also an examination of the extent to which the Foreign Office saw itself as the ultimate arbiter over Corporation decisions and the increasingly blurred line between BBC independence and official sanction. In an unstable and contradictory fashion, the Foreign Office sometimes complained about the BBC's left-wing bias and at others, protested against what it regarded as the Corporation's 'pro-Nazi' sentiments. By 1936, the Foreign Office would seek to minimize broadcasts which portrayed Nazi Germany in a negative light. Although the Corporation cooperated with the Foreign Office, their relationship did not emerge as a result of pressure or coercion. The BBC was a willing partner of the Foreign Office.⁶

Part one also looks at the BBC's unofficial diplomatic role including instances when the Corporation formally apologized to foreign governments for 'offensive' broadcasts. Here we shall see how the BBC maintained formal relations with foreign governments and their agencies, particularly, the Nazi *Reichs Rundfunk Gesellschaft*. The relationship between these two agencies encouraged, in part, BBC broadcasts designed to promote 'mutual understanding' between Britain and Germany. But, while the Corporation went to great lengths to portray positive features found within the 'new Germany' it also permitted broadcasts which were critical of Germany's less palatable features, such as its militaristic outlook and its concerted policy of rearmament. When it came to the anti-Jewish persecution (discussed in part two), the BBC scrupulously followed an absolute line of 'objectivity' apparently believing that the only 'objective' way to relate this information was to grant equal weight to both 'sides'. This pinpoints the BBC's approach to news dissemination and objectivity overall; that all views were legitimate and had a right to be argued in an arena of ideas. But this belief did not seem to

⁵ Bryan Haworth, 'The British Broadcasting Corporation, Nazi Germany and the Foreign Office: 1933-1936', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, volume I, number I (March 1981), 53

⁶ A historiographical survey on the existing literature in relation to the BBC and the Foreign Office is discussed in part one, see below pp. 24-25

cut across all lines of political and religious viewpoints. The fear of communism and Reith's belief that broadcasting 'should not be allowed to assist the process of secularization', provided non-Christians, leftists and others with comparatively few opportunities to engage the microphone.⁷ Part one aims to define the framework with in which the BBC operated. The pursuit of appeasement increasingly determined the content of news broadcasts concerning Germany. A belief in the promotion of mutual understanding, shared by the BBC and the Foreign Office, created an environment within which it was held that negative broadcasting about Nazi Germany would only exacerbate diplomatic tension.

Part two attempts to show that a policy that amounted to 'appeasement broadcasting' had only an indirect impact on information relating to the anti-Jewish crisis. In fact, there is no evidence to show that the desire to broadcast fuller accounts of persecution ever emerged. There was no conspiracy within the halls of Broadcasting House to keep information about the Jewish condition muted but there seemed to be higher broadcast priorities. In any case, the Corporation saw anti-Jewish persecution as secondary to other forms of Nazi repression, most notably, anti-Church persecution. The Jewish community, moreover, was seen as a racial minority but regarded as a well-organized political force with one broadcaster observing how the Jews 'have always been self-contained'.⁸ When information about anti-Jewish repression reached the airwaves, the tone of the broadcast almost always implied that Jews, along with Marxists and Social Democrats, constituted a *political opposition*. Jews, it seemed, could 'escape' persecution themselves by a reversal of their ideological affiliation as might Marxists and Social Democrats too. The myth of race also contributed to the frequent stereotypical portrayals of heavily accented 'East End' Jews in BBC broadcast comedy sketches and associations which linked Jews with exaggerated cultural and physical features.⁹ All this did not pass unnoticed by Anglo-Jewish representatives. The Anglo-Jewish community and the efforts

⁷ Ian McIntyre, *The Expense of Glory: A Life of John Reith* (London, 1993), 188. quoting Reith to a committee on wireless in 1927.

⁸ BBC Scripts, Lord Baldwin, 'A World's Good Cause: An Appeal for Jews and non-Aryan Christians', 8 December 1938

⁹ see below pp. 86-87

made on its behalf by the Board of Deputies of British Jews established an informal relationship with the BBC in order to monitor broadcasts relating to Jewish affairs.

In the climate of 1930s Britain, perhaps it is not surprising to discover that the BBC applied a distorted conception of race to individuals that was usually linked to their nationality or religion (i.e. 'German race', 'Jewish race'). But what is surprising was the extent to which the Corporation 'spiritually surrendered' to Nazi conceptions of race by adopting some of the language of German racialism. When describing 'non-Aryans' broadcasters failed to differentiate Germany's mythological belief in an 'Aryan' race and, perhaps, their own. So instead of discussing persecution against those 'Germany saw as non-Aryans', the BBC would describe the suffering of 'non-Aryans'. Broadcasts also often implied that Jews were partially responsible for the increase in anti-Semitic persecution. The German-Jewish condition was discussed frequently alongside reports about monopolistic corporations and powerful and exploitative banks run by Jews. The implication, of course, was that Jewish behavior helped to contribute to a renewed atmosphere of anti-Semitism, a belief in what historian Tony Kushner describes as 'well-earned anti-Semitism'.¹⁰ This line of reasoning also helped the BBC to justify its moderated treatment of Jewish-related news whether it had to do with Nazi Germany or not. The belief went that if the BBC broadcast too much information about the Jews, it could only exacerbate anti-Semitism at home.

In order to contextualize properly the cultural milieu in which the BBC operated, part two opens with a general survey examining the social anti-Semitism of British society in the 1930s. If the history of British anti-Semitism - both political and violent - has been well-documented, the study of social anti-Semitism has been largely neglected.¹¹ Traditional notions of anti-Semitism have been associated with violence and terror and the conscious hatred of individuals. By the 1930s, this overt or 'conscious' anti-Semitism no longer remained socially acceptable and those who spouted the language of late nineteenth-century anti-Semitism were marginalized. A more unconscious anti-Semitism,

¹⁰ Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford, 1994), 40

¹¹ see Gisela Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England 1918-1939* (London, 1978). Also see Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876-1939* (New York, 1979)

however, replaced its predecessor and defined the common attitudes toward Jews held among a large segment of British society. It was a much more abstract form of bigotry, a combination of ignorance and ambivalence and a hyperbolized belief in the power of the Jewish community. It was not the radical anti-Semitism of the British Union of Fascists or the Britons, but an 'unconscious' anti-Semitism reflected throughout many levels of society. It was an attitude which linked Jews, refugees and Communists so that they would become virtually synonymous. Martin Gilbert writes that anti-Semitism was a common feature of British thought 'not confined to any particular class, which was widespread enough to blunt the edge of criticism against Hitler's racial policies. Nor did one have necessarily to be an anti-Semite in order to avoid being horrified by Nazi policy towards the Jews.'¹²

Tony Kushner describes widespread social anti-Semitism as the limit of tolerance in a liberal society. Common sentiments held toward Jews by individuals within British society enabled people to hold a 'bifurcated' perspective in relation to their attitude toward Jews.¹³ A distinction could thus be drawn between 'good' Jews and 'bad' ones. This social perception enabled individuals to attempt to understand the measures taken against the German-Jewish community, but not necessarily to agree with the severity of them. The activities of the BBC in the 1930s exemplified the argument presented in Kushner's revisionist study of British 'social anti-Semitism'.

II. BBC history and studies of broadcasting and the Holocaust

During its first decade of mass broadcasting, the BBC was occupied with the natural administrative glitches and organizational affairs of any new corporation. The 1930s was to see news, talks, sports, entertainment and variety eventually falling under separate administrative control. International short-wave transmissions and Empire broadcasts, at the same time, were technologically perfected by the end of the decade.

¹² Martin Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (London, 1966), 162

¹³ Kushner, p. 36

Most importantly during this period, however, was the BBC's struggle to carve out an independent identity or at the very least, give the appearance of functioning as a totally autonomous entity, free from the editorial reins of the state. The line between the BBC's independence and its complicity with the wishes of the Foreign Office had, throughout the 1930s, become blurred.

Several historians have chronicled the formative years of the BBC and some have discussed this very issue. Asa Briggs has written the definitive history of the BBC discussing its development and its emergence as a powerful British institution.¹⁴ Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff have written an exhaustive account of the BBC's early social history which deals briefly with the Corporation's relationship to the Foreign Office.¹⁵ Unlike Scannell and Cardiff, Briggs' account largely ignores the relationship between the Foreign Office and the BBC.¹⁶ One writer, referring to Briggs' third volume on the wartime BBC, has argued rightly that Briggs' history, by neglecting to address fully the question of self-imposed censorship, largely exonerates the BBC from these charges.¹⁷ Although it is virtually impossible to engage in any discussion of the BBC without consulting Briggs, there are enough gaps in his account that merit greater examination.

Other historians have looked at the BBC's role during the Second World War and its impact upon occupied Europe. Jean Seaton wrote an important account of the BBC's broadcast coverage of what came to be known as the Holocaust and Gabriel Milland is currently finishing a doctoral dissertation on the same subject.¹⁸ Both of these historians share one similar conclusion: the BBC had more information than they dispensed for public consumption but the material broadcast was not totally insignificant. Seaton writes:

Within the BBC any prominent official could have known about the Nazi plans and actions against the Jews from information that was regularly circulated within the organization. Indeed, so could any member of the public. They were told as much as readers of the *Jewish Chronicle*. Public opinion was not aroused more

¹⁴ see Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (5 vols., Oxford, 1965)

¹⁵ Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting. Volume I: Serving the Nation* (Oxford, 1991)

¹⁶ Scannell and Cardiff and Briggs are more fully developed in an historiographical survey, see below pp. 24-25

¹⁷ Gabriel Milland, 'A very British kind of censorship: The BBC and the Holocaust' (unpublished essay given at the IHR on 31 October 1996), 1

¹⁸ see Jean Seaton, 'The BBC and the Holocaust', *European Journal of Communication*, volume II (1987). Gabriel Milland is currently finishing his doctoral dissertation at the University of Leicester.

because 'doing' something about it seemed impossible, and it was a low priority on the political agenda.¹⁹

Seaton also explains that the popular idea of the 'Jew', described by Kushner, which was deeply ingrained into the British consciousness, was also reflected on the walls of Broadcasting House.²⁰ 'The BBC displayed,' writes Seaton 'both before and during the war, views and decisions that were quite simply anti-Semitic.'²¹ Seaton's account, like this one, is concerned with the information that was available and *how* it was presented. She acknowledges that there were very few instances during the War when information about death camps was suppressed. It simply did not feature high on the priority list of BBC broadcasting.²² This dissertation, then, is designed, in part, to give greater context to the issues raised in these examinations of the BBC and the Holocaust. Although this study ends with the year 1938 and therefore does not deal with the Corporation's broadcast coverage of mass murder, it is crucial in understanding the way in which the BBC went about dealing with pre-war anti-Jewish persecution in order to grasp how it dealt with the information about wartime atrocities. This will be developed further in the conclusion.

Any examination into the dissemination of information during the Holocaust falls broadly under the discipline of Holocaust and Genocide Studies. More recently, the sub-discipline of 'Bystander studies' has come to encompass the study of individuals and institutions which had knowledge of pre-war persecution and wartime mass murder but either failed to act or were unable to do anything. The time period covered in this discussion predates what is commonly called the Holocaust. My intention is to add another dimension to this sub-discipline.[†] The following two sections outline the contextual background necessary to understand the impact and significance of radio during the 1930s.

¹⁹ Seaton, pp. 75-76

²⁰ Kushner, p. 36 He writes about the deeply ingrained view of 'the Jew'.

²¹ Seaton, p. 66

²² Seaton, p. 69. She writes: 'Anti-Semitism was not taken seriously and seen almost as a historical anachronism in a modern world [...] This confident dismissal of anti-Semitism was an unspoken assumption which undoubtedly acted as an impediment to counter attack.'

[†] Many historians have described the period beginning in 1941 and ending in 1945 as the Holocaust period. More recently, historians have included the years 1933-1941 as part of the Holocaust period.

III. Radio and the press

It is not surprising that the BBC played a significant role in the early development of wireless broadcasting. When the British Broadcasting Company became incorporated in 1927, Sir John Reith (later Lord), the BBC's first director-general recognized radio's potential for disseminating information, a potential more powerful than the printed press and one which could standardize the way information was received by the public. 'Broadcasting is a huge agency of standardisation,' concurred Hilda Matheson, the Corporation's first director of talks, in 1933, 'the most powerful the world has ever seen.'

²³ Marconi's wireless invention was to revolutionize the spread of information and in turn, increase the international influence of the media. When radio emerged as a significant medium in the 1930s, the BBC was one of a handful of successful and important broadcast outfits in the world. Reith's BBC was a world-leader in the technological development of mass communication. But what differentiated the BBC from its international counterparts was its strictly non-commercial nature and the expression it gave to 'democratic enlightenment'. ²⁴ The British government recognized too, the disseminatory potential of radio, and actively encouraged its development by helping to make it a publicly-funded institution. Annual license fees not only enabled the Corporation to function without too many financial difficulties but also helped to define the true 'democratic' nature of the BBC - an institution which would have to remain accountable to the public who contributed the funds, and to the state which facilitated the distribution of these funds.

In 1929 over two million British households paid a radio license fee and this figure grew by twenty percent per annum throughout the 1930s. By 1938, nearly nine million British households paid a license fee for radio or 71.4 families out of every 100.²⁵ It is, however, impossible to measure the real social impact of radio using statistics alone. 'Radio in the living room had become, by the end of the thirties, part of the furniture of

²³ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless* (Oxford, 1965), ix

²⁴ Scannell and Cardiff, p. 13

²⁵ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, volume III: The War of Words* (London, 1970), Appendix B. These statistics are also found in the *British Broadcasting Corporation Handbook* (London, 1940), 106

everyday domestic existence.’²⁶ These figures are significant and indicate the rapid growth of radio during the 1930s. But the real impact of radio can be measured by the meteoric rise of the BBC as a British institution, ‘as British as the Bank of England’.²⁷ The concept of objectivity was to be a hallmark of news broadcasting from its very inception. Unlike the press, ‘British broadcast news service, is the ally of responsible journalism everywhere’ said Sir Stephen Tallents, BBC controller of public relations, in 1937. ‘A newspaper with a private axe to grind cannot now invent or suppress news so easily as it could before wireless came.’²⁸ The publicly-owned BBC was a service designed for the public who funded it and one which ideally had to appeal to every social element by holding fast to the idea of objectivity. British newspapers often interpreted news in a politically-biased fashion, the result of which was a disparity in the way information was received along geographical and social lines. The intention of radio was to change that.²⁹ By the 1930s, the BBC began to rival print media in its power to disseminate information to a broad audience. There were important differences, however, between broadcast and print media and their separate interpretations of similar news events. While ‘dailies’ in different regions went about presenting similar information in dissimilar ways, the BBC, by contrast, presented news in a standardized format. Listeners in Edinburgh, thus, heard the same broadcast as listeners in Brighton. Radio, through a single and consistent interpretation of news events, had a centralizing effect on the collective consciousness of Britons.

Andrew Sharf argues that, on the whole, the British press failed to develop the idea that anti-Semitism was a fundamental feature of Nazi Germany.³⁰ There was no attempt, until 1935, to show that anti-Semitism was endemic to Nazi Germany or that it was an official policy. Sharf also shows how anti-Jewish persecution was often presented as the marginal actions of peripheral German figures. Another conclusion he develops

²⁶ Scannell and Cardiff, p. 14

²⁷ Briggs, vol. II, p. 11

²⁸ Siân Nicholas, ‘Radio and the Popular Press: 1922-1945’ (unpublished essay given at the ICBH Conference of 9-10 September 1996), 14

²⁹ Briggs, volume II, p. 8. He writes: ‘Given the wide social and geographical divisions in Britain, it [the wireless] had a limited if useful role as the interpreter of one part of “the great audience” to another.’

³⁰ Andrew Sharf, *The British Press and the Jews under Nazi Rule* (Oxford, 1964), 40

points to the general emphasis, in the press, placed on the prominence of Jews in Nazi Germany. He writes: 'It was hard for British journalists and political commentators to understand that the Jews were not being persecuted for alleged crimes or "anti-social" practices [...] but precisely because of their positive achievements in commerce, industry, and the professions.'³¹ Sharf also shows how much of the popular press consistently reiterated its 'neutrality' on the subject of anti-Jewish persecution.³² The anti-Jewish crisis was often presented as a result of long-standing differences between Nazis and Jews and implied that there were 'sides' to be taken. In one example, he discusses a story reported in the *Daily Express* on a press conference given by Prussian Prime Minister Hermann Goering. The report also featured coverage of an anti-Nazi protest meeting held by the Board of Deputies of British Jews. One half of the page featured a photograph of Goering under the title 'the Accusation', the other half showed a photograph of the Board meeting under the title 'the Denial'.³³ Often, Sharf writes, the popular press focused on a 'startling' event but never made an attempt to develop a methodical compilation of anti-Jewish persecution.³⁴ Everything else, suggests Sharf's evidence, was a non event.

Sharf's study, however, differs from this discussion in one very distinct way. Unlike the 'standardized' format of the BBC, there was a discrepancy in the way this news was handled from one daily to the next. Anti-Jewish persecution was, on the whole, covered prominently in the *Manchester Guardian* throughout the 1930s, while *The Times* and the *Telegraph* initially stressed anti-Communist persecution, often implying its justification.³⁵ With the exception of the *Guardian*, on balance the press underestimated the severity and implications of persecution. In addition, many newspapers, like the *Daily Express*, featured anti-Jewish persecution prominently in 1933 because, as Sharf observes, there was 'good news value in the Jewish question.'³⁶ As other newspapers began to

³¹ *ibid.*

³² The *Daily Express* of 25 March 1934 wrote that it was 'neither pro-Jewish nor pro-Nazi, anti-Jewish nor anti-Nazi'. *ibid.*, 15

³³ *ibid.*, 16

³⁴ *ibid.*, 73

³⁵ Andrew Sharf, 'The British Press and the Holocaust', *Yad Vashem Studies*, volume V (Jerusalem, 1963), 169-192. He writes: 'The disparity of approach [to the anti-Jewish persecution] was so wide that it was hard to believe the same event was being discussed at all.'

³⁶ Sharf, *The British Press and Jews under Nazi Rule*, p. 14

discuss the situation more fully, the *Daily Express* moderated its own coverage because it no longer ensured the paper's increasing circulation. In light of Sharf's work, it is surprising that virtually nothing has been written about the BBC and its approach to the so-called 'Jewish question' during the interwar Nazi period. Given the remit within which it saw itself as being 'duty bound' to operate, the BBC's ambivalence toward the crisis is a dysfunction which has been strangely ignored by social historians.

The BBC was designed to carry out an important primary task in relation to news. That task was to tell the truth, make it accessible to a wide audience, and deliver the information in the absence of morally subjective criticism. Reith's BBC was to be the standard-bearer of truth and objectivity. The director-general's Corporation embarked on a moral crusade whose ultimate truth was to be found in unbiased, unpropagated information. The 1935 *BBC Annual* stated: 'Broadcasting has an opportunity and responsibility which no newspaper can ever have. It is impossible to exaggerate the value to the nation and the world of an unbiased, accurate, and balanced presentation, day by day, of the significant news. That is the ideal which the B.B.C. has before it.'³⁷ The limit to this idealism, however, especially in relation to broadcasting the anti-Jewish persecution, was a moral relativism derived from the absolute belief that there were always two 'sides' to every story. The interwar years, in addition, was a period during which the exchange of information and its dissemination was relatively free. Between 1933 and 1939, information on Nazi policy with regard to the Jewish population in Germany was widely available to the media, the Foreign Office and even tourists.³⁸ Indeed the issue of anti-Jewish persecution could be described as salient in pre-war Nazi Germany. Those

³⁷ *BBC Annual 1935* (London, 1935), 61

³⁸ Kushner, p. 23. He writes: 'There was [...] a greater synchronism between Nazi policies and knowledge of them outside Germany in the period from 1933-1939 than at any other stage of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the manner in which news concerning anti-Jewish legislation, expulsions and violence became assimilated in free world countries was, despite the clarity of information available, still complicated, reflecting the importance of domestic ideologies.' Andrew Sharf writes: 'With certain exceptions, the Nazis made no attempt whatever to conceal what was going on [...] During the whole six years of peace [1933-1939] every one of those regulations (beginning with that applying to the German Bar, a restriction unprecedented in modern Europe) was published and circulated through perfectly ordinary channels. The world was officially informed and left to draw what conclusions it could, and, while the authorities angrily denied the truth of particular incidents in their street campaign, they did not deny the campaign itself or try to hide the main lines of its development [...] freedom of movement for the foreign press and opportunity to gather news were [...] almost entirely unrestricted.', pp. 7-8.

who broadcast information about these policies were almost always individuals well-versed in German policy and culture, people who had spent time in Germany and who were sensitive to events as they unfolded.³⁹ But the way in which this information was broadcast was invariably superficial.

IV. News and the Talks Department

In 1933 radio was still a fairly new medium and one which would expose both the reading and non-reading public alike to new forms of information. 'We really believed that broadcasting could revolutionize human opinion,' wrote Lionel Fielden, a Talks department executive.⁴⁰ The pioneers at Broadcasting House, whether taking part in music production or selecting speakers for topical talks, set the tone for British broadcasting in the 1930s. It was an exciting time to be taking part in an information revolution which combined technology and creativity. Those who established the technological and editorial infrastructure of the BBC were, literally, at the center of this revolution. Sophisticated machinery had to be developed rapidly in order to broadcast from remote locations. Talented minds had to develop abstract techniques which could enable listeners to combine the sound with a vivid mental imagery.

³⁹ Broadcasters discussing Germany were often individuals who had close connections with senior German officials. When considering whether to use Sefton Delmer of the *Daily Express* as a broadcaster on German affairs, one memorandum in support of his appointment noted: 'Delmer is [...] bi-lingual and a close friend of Hitler and the Nazi movement. He is, however, fairly independent.' British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archive Center, Caversham Park (hereafter BBC WAC) R51/582 talks from abroad, memorandum on Delmer, 4 April 1933.

Another BBC broadcaster, Sir Evelyn Wrench, in a letter to his producer, noted how he had asked whether Dr. Goebbels, 'would like to give me a message for British listeners?' He went on to write: 'My friend, Dr. Goebbels, the German Minister of Propaganda, is as you know, a great wireless fan.' BBC WAC Sir Evelyn Wrench file I, 1932-34, Wrench to talks assistant Lionel Fielden, 12 April 1933

In addition, many of the broadcasters were familiar with Nazi policy and had read *Mein Kampf*. One broadcaster called it 'a strange mixture of commonsense, wild theory, and dangerous false doctrine.' BBC Scripts, S.K. Ratcliffe, 'My Glimpse of the New Germany', 31 July 1933

⁴⁰ Briggs, vol. II, p. 13. quoting Lionel Fielden on the birth of broadcasting.

Under Hilda Matheson, news features and topical talks took on a bold tone and a critical perspective in these earliest broadcasts.[†] The era often referred to as the 'golden age' of the Talks department was one which also inaugurated the decade of political stratification, of direct confrontation between Fascism and Communism.⁴¹ Political crisis and revolutionary upheaval, thus, marked the period under which Matheson, and later Charles Siepmann and Richard Maconachie, processed news and made it accessible to the listening public. The age of Matheson lasted until 1932, Siepmann lasted until 1935 and their respective tenures formed the most 'radical' period of the Talks department.[‡] It was only with Maconachie's arrival that the substance and style of news content was altered by the removal of critical news analysis and the adoption of closer ties with Foreign Office policy.⁴² The Talks department was not a monolithic one in terms of individual political outlooks. Until 1935, the airwaves were filled with contrasting views and differing interests but dominated by a liberal-minded ideology whose *laissez-faire* approach towards the exchange of information promoted the marketplace of ideas, in the face of politically slanted press publications.⁴³ Most broadcasters in the department shared the Matheson-Siepmann approach to broadcasting, even if they held divergent interpretations of news events. This era was far more experimental than subsequent ones which, as we shall see, inspired a total retreat from controversy by 1938.⁴⁴

News bulletins and news features were two separate forms of dissemination in both content and editorial control. Throughout the 1930s, BBC news bulletins were simply re-written wire accounts provided by Reuters. The only opportunity for the News department to compose and produce its own broadcasts was through features and talks. These regular features, which might deal with contemporary world affairs or the political climate in Britain, were usually written and delivered by experts or respected journalists. Men like Wickham Steed, John Hilton, Harold Nicolson, Vernon Bartlett, Richard

[†] The News department was a subsidiary of the Talks department until 1934. After this time, the News department became a separate unit.

⁴¹ Scannell and Cardiff, p. 161

[‡] There was a short, two-month interregnum when a caretaker director of talks, J.M. Rose-Troup, took over the department for a few months until the arrival of Maconachie in early 1936.

⁴² Some called Maconachie's arrival a 'swing to the right'. (Scannell and Cardiff, p. 161)

⁴³ Scannell and Cardiff, p. 155

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 18

Crossman and F.A. Voigt who dealt generally with foreign affairs, were all highly regarded by their colleagues and selected on the basis of their intellect, not necessarily their broadcasting ability.

Although Matheson and Siepmann shared a fundamental outlook on the free exchange of information, they were bound to operate under specific rules governing controversy and political content. 'If once you let broadcasting into politics, you will never be able to keep politics out of broadcasting' argued the postmaster-general in 1926 when testifying in front of a Parliament considering the incorporation of the British Broadcasting Company.⁴⁵ Issues that were broadcast were chosen in the main for their relevance to the current state of political and diplomatic affairs and their appeal to the listening audience. Many key issues, and particularly those considered diplomatically sensitive by the Foreign Office, were treated delicately, often watered down and always carefully scrutinized internally. It must be remembered that although most talks and panel discussions were broadcast live, they were always scripted and, after 1934, always passed through the hands of Foreign Office officials before broadcast.[†] Any news talks that hinted at bias were to be avoided. When contentious issues did threaten to creep into broadcasting, the Corporation was seen to retrace its steps and adhere to its conservative, placatory guidelines.

It is impossible to write an account of the BBC's handling of the Jewish crisis in Germany without considering a few basic factors. Many executives within the Corporation and the Foreign Office understood the severity of the anti-Jewish persecution. There were individuals involved with either (or both) of these institutions who had spent time in Nazi Germany and who chronicled their experiences and observations. The Foreign Office had incredibly insightful and acute accounts of the Jewish situation in Germany, the most compelling evidence for which is to be found in the Public Records Office. Countless documents relating to this very issue were exchanged and discussed from the earliest, most overt form of Nazi state-sponsored anti-Semitism; the 1 April

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 23

[†] Reith and Foreign Press Office (FPO) representative Robert Vansittart agreed in 1934 to clear all manuscripts for broadcast with the FPO before they could air. For more on this see below, pg. 36

boycott of 1933. Detailed reports were sent regularly to the Foreign Office from the British Embassy in Berlin discussing, in depth, acts of anti-Semitic violence from the smallest German villages to cities like Berlin. BBC reporters sent letters back to Broadcasting House from their remote locations, detailing their own experiences and sometimes describing the Jewish condition. But what does this tell us about the editorial process that failed to 'tell the whole story'? It is difficult to know how well these correspondents understood the defining racial feature of Nazi Germany. It is also difficult to gauge their own perceptions of the racial state, especially in a climate of racial categorization not dissimilar to that which operated in Britain.

The 1930s were years of economic strife, social and political stratification and diplomatic instability. Those who had experienced war vowed never to revisit its devastation and no price seemed too high to avert disaster. Perhaps this was the underlying factor which determined Britain's attitude that the affairs of Germany were of no consequence to Britain. Perhaps it was this sentiment that echoed in Chamberlain's notorious words when he cried out: 'How horrible - fantastic - incredible - it is, that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing.'⁴⁶ Rarely, if ever, do complete sets of correspondence and memoranda survive. The challenge presented to an historian by incomplete documentation is to remain balanced when piecing together the existing material to form an accurate narrative. The available evidence points to an institution, the BBC, which neither grasped the implications of Nazi anti-Jewish persecution nor was it particularly concerned about the issue. Why there was 'no story' is the real story.

⁴⁶ BBC Scripts, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, 'Mr. Chamberlain to the Empire', 27 September 1938. Chamberlain's response to the Sudeten crisis.

PART I
THE BBC, APPEASEMENT AND THE FOREIGN OFFICE

The aim of the News Department has been to
give the most important of the day's news, and
treat it with complete impartiality.

BBC Annual 1937

Every morning BBC employees arrive at Broadcasting House and walk under the carved stone figures of Prospero and Ariel, jutting out from the building's facade. In 1931 Reith had Shakespeare's Prospero and Ariel, the former a fair-minded autocrat, the latter his dutiful and mystical servant carved into the building perhaps to symbolize the relationship between the Corporation and its employees.[†] The fundamental feature of British broadcasting was to be objectivity and fair-mindedness and the fundamental task its employees were to carry out was the spread of information in a fair-minded manner. The connection between Prospero and Ariel and the Foreign Office and the BBC also parallels the reality of the Corporation's relationship with the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office was, in many ways, Prospero to the BBC's Ariel. Perhaps for some it was a daily reminder of the relationship between the Corporation and the state. It was a relationship that also reflected the uncertainty of the interwar period.

The 1930s inaugurated a period of technological advancement which facilitated the exchange of communications. The wireless revolution was not only taking place in the United Kingdom but all across Europe. Radio Paris, Radio Luxembourg and the German *Reichs Rundfunk Gesellschaft* broadcast a whole new world of information into the homes of their listeners.¹ The most significant impact of the wireless was, perhaps, its accessibility to listeners from outside the political boundaries of a particular country. Rapid technological improvements allowed listeners in Britain, Germany, France and elsewhere to receive short-wave broadcasts from international news bureaus. Many international organizations, as a result, saw radio technology as a substantive mechanism through which to advance the cause of mutual understanding. The League of Nations was particularly intrigued with this possibility and encouraged member states to comply with a convention called 'Broadcasting for Peace'.² Under the terms set out under the League

[†] There has been little written on the architectural features of Broadcasting House which could in itself, merit a thesis. The building was (and is still) a technological and architectural masterpiece. The figures of Prospero and Ariel were probably inserted to symbolize the emergence of a new British institution. Shakespearean scholars often point to Prospero as the literary figure who most represents Shakespeare and Shakespeare represented everything about British culture to which the Corporation aspired.

¹ The German wireless, the *Volksempfänger*, significantly advanced the Nazi state's ability to carry out propaganda on a mass scale. The Nazis popularized the wireless in Germany by introducing a cheap version in 1933. By 1939, Germany had the highest percentage of wireless owners in the world. in Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.), *Documents on Nazism 1919-1945* (London, 1974), 340

² Public Record Office at Kew, Foreign Office Papers /371/20487 1936. (hereafter PRO FO)

treaty, broadcasts relating to foreign affairs were required to adhere to a particular standard. If a Radio Paris account of life in Britain were to be broadcast, for example, certain provisions providing for objective reporting were to be adhered to. The League also created an arbitration body which would settle any disputes between foreign nations concerning broadcast accounts.[§] The representatives responsible for enforcing the treaty in Britain were officials from the Foreign Office.

Foreign Office officials also represented British broadcasting at the League of Nations. The problem with official representation of BBC affairs was that it infringed upon the Corporation's independent and unofficial status as a news provider.[†] 'If this convention ever comes into force,' asked one Foreign Office official 'shall we not have to institute a rather closer system of supervision than at present?'³ Under a current agreement between the Corporation and the Foreign Office, the BBC forwarded all manuscripts meant for broadcast to the latter. The Foreign Office, in turn, could make editorial suggestions to BBC officials who almost always complied with them.⁴ Any official acceptance of the League convention, therefore, would shift editorial responsibility onto the British government and give the appearance that the Corporation was an official organ of the state. 'It's [the BBC's] responsibility (and, therefore, under the Convention, ours) is proportionally heavier,' wrote one concerned Foreign Office official.⁵

Several historians have attempted to deal with the issue of British broadcasting policy and state intervention. The most recent account was included as a chapter in Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff's social history written in 1991. In dealing with the BBC and the Foreign Office, however, the account presents little new information. Scannell and Cardiff come to the same conclusion as Bryan Haworth to whom they are indebted. Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that they drew upon the material available in the Foreign Office archives. Haworth's conclusion, published in 1981, prefigures that

[§] Germany, which had by this time withdrawn its membership from the League of Nations, did not take part in the convention.

[†] The 'unofficial' status of the BBC meant that it did not represent the 'official' views of the state.

³ PRO FO/371/20487 1936, internal Foreign Office minutes, 6 May 1936.

⁴ For more, see below pp. 37-38

⁵ PRO FO/371/20487 1936, internal Foreign Office minutes, 6 May 1936. Rex Leeper, an official at the Foreign Office, in agreeing with the sentiments of his colleagues warned that the Foreign Office had to 'walk very warily in seeming to censor news.'

presented here; that the BBC was a willing partner of the Foreign Office. He writes: 'the essential factor in insuring the docility of the BBC was neither the action of the Foreign Office nor the advice of journalists but the nature of the institution itself.'⁶ The evidence presented in Haworth's piece, which draws considerable material from the Foreign Office papers, remains relevant and valuable but it was written before the release of other documentation and the discussion he presents ends with the year 1936. As a result, Haworth does not discuss the broadcasting policy shift that was to take place in 1936; a retreat, on the part of the BBC, from broadcasting material excessively critical of Nazi Germany. Before 1936, as we shall see, and as Haworth shows, the Foreign Office complained about what they saw as 'pro-German' broadcasts. After this time, and as a direct result of the state's policy of appeasement, the Foreign Office influenced the Corporation to promote positive accounts of Germany.

Conversely, Anthony Adamthwaite has characterized the BBC as a 'reluctant partner' of the Foreign Office.⁷ His piece on the BBC's relationship with the state during the Munich crisis, published in 1983, suggests that a majority of BBC executives were reluctant to 'toe the official line'.⁸ While Adamthwaite's central conclusion supports the argument that Foreign Office intervention saw the BBC adopting a more cautious approach to news controversy, he implies that the BBC was unhappy about this arrangement and even controlled against their will.⁹ Adamthwaite's interpretation of the evidence does not examine, in full, the extent to which broadcasting emerged as a significant factor during the appeasement talks. Because his discussion is limited only to one year, it fails to show the pattern of BBC collaboration with the Foreign Office after 1934. Asa Briggs has written: 'While there was liaison between the Foreign Office and the BBC in the field of listener research, this did not influence programme policy.'¹⁰ The BBC, as subsequent sections shall explain, was not a reluctant partner of the Foreign Office and the 'liaison' between the Corporation and the Foreign Office went much further

⁶ Haworth, p. 51

⁷ Anthony Adamthwaite, 'The British Government and the Media, 1937-1938', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 18 (1983), 281-297

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 293

⁹ *ibid.*, He writes that the BBC was 'firmly on the leash', p. 282

¹⁰ Briggs, vol. II, p. 374

than cooperation on matters relating to listener research. Much like Ariel, the Corporation cooperated with the state dutifully. In relation to its status as an independent news organization, the BBC, by 1934, had voluntarily surrendered a significant amount of its editorial independence to the Foreign Office.

This first part attempts to explain why 'political' reports, especially those relating to foreign affairs and specifically, German affairs, were controversial and approached delicately. It is also an examination of how the BBC news department was able to make a rational connection between 'objectivity' and diplomatic expediency in order to serve as a silent partner in helping the Foreign Office to pursue a policy of appeasement. A result of this relationship was the watered-down broadcast coverage of 'negative' issues which were alleged as internal to the political affairs of Germany.

I. Appeasement and broadcasting's emergence

The interwar period provided British diplomacy with a challenging and strenuous time. The lingering psychological impact of a war fought less than fifteen years prior to the rise of the Nazi regime formed the foundation for Britain's foreign policy - a policy determined to avert the disaster of another war. Although Britain was bound to her neighbors through previous treaties (for example the Locarno Pact), a growing sense of isolationism began to dominate the state's approach to foreign affairs during the 1930s.[§] Isolationist diplomacy transformed into a policy of appeasement by the second half of the decade. Much has already been written about appeasement.¹¹ We know that it was a policy designed to maintain international stability in the diplomatic realm or as Martin Gilbert writes, 'a policy of hope'.¹² The primary benefactor of appeasement, in fact its conscious target, was Germany.

[§] The Locarno Pact, signed on 1 December 1925, created a nonaggression agreement between France, Germany and Belgium and was guaranteed by Britain and Italy.

¹¹ see Martin Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (London, 1966)

¹² Gilbert, p. 147

In the 1930s, Germany emerged as the most significant potential threat to European stability. A renewed militarism, an aggressive rearmament plan and political speeches tinged with warlike rhetoric quickly replaced the moderate nationalism of the Weimar republic. The Foreign Office, eager to sustain European diplomatic stability, carefully pursued the maintenance of positive Anglo-German relations carefully. While the new German regime embarked on a course determined to dismantle the terms set out under the Versailles treaty, the Foreign Office turned a blind eye. Indeed, by 1935, the two nations agreed on terms to control naval rearmament even though Germany's actions violated the Versailles treaty.[†] Although Nazism presented a new diplomatic challenge for the Foreign Office, the specter of Eastern Communism was viewed throughout Whitehall as the greatest danger to British sovereignty. Hitler's regime, while seen as an unsavory form of government, was considered a lesser threat and even a bulwark against Eastern expansion. While there were individuals within the Foreign Office throughout the 1930s who viewed Nazism unfavorably, the maintenance of stable Anglo-German relations prevailed above personal sentiment and political differences. Before his first meeting with Hitler in 1937, Lord Halifax, who was soon after to become Britain's foreign secretary, (succeeding Antony Eden), wrote: 'Although there was much in the Nazi system that offended British opinion (treatment of the Church; to perhaps [a] less extent, the treatment of Jews, treatment of Trade Unions), I was not blind to what he [Hitler] had done for Germany and to the achievement from his point of view of keeping Communism out of his country and, as he would feel of blocking its passage West.'¹³ This fear of Communism and the commitment to maintaining European diplomatic stability determined the Foreign Office's approach to German issues.

The policy of appeasement was, above all, about British interests and the stability of Anglo-German relations proved crucial in the maintenance of Britain's status as a world power. By the time the Munich negotiations had formally commenced in 1938, Foreign Office officials had even considered a plan to develop a limited Anglo-German military

[†] German naval rearmament was a violation of the terms set out under the Versailles treaty which restricted the extent of German rearmament.

¹³ Gilbert, p. 162

alliance - one which might pose a challenge to the terms set under the Locarno Treaty.¹⁴ The Foreign Office, in addition, was concerned about creating the proper cultural climate in which to advance appeasement. The forces which might enable this climate included the media, and particularly broadcasting.

The policy of appeasement was not simply about diplomatic maneuvering. The pursuit of appeasement transcended the consciousness of political and cultural organizations, the press and most importantly, the BBC because these were institutions which had a profound impact on the way Germany was perceived within Britain. While the free exchange of information was not significantly hampered among foreign news agencies during the pre-war Nazi period, German officials made no secret of their contempt for the way the British media covered Germany. The maintenance of stable Anglo-German relations, at times, hinged on the appeasement of German officials who were concerned about the negative press the state received in Britain.

The relationship between the Foreign Office and the media, therefore, was affected by the former's cautionary approach toward Anglo-German diplomacy. But while certain sectors of the British press angered Germany, these usually functioned outside the realm of state control. The BBC, by contrast, operated as an independent organization but was, by definition, a state-supported institution. The nature of the Corporation's standing, then, was such that the Foreign Office felt it could reasonably assert its agenda upon it and expect the BBC to cooperate. That is not to say the Corporation was a tool of the state nor did the state have the organic power to exercise direct control over BBC policy. The

¹⁴ In a memorandum written by Foreign Secretary Antony Eden for the Committee on Foreign Policy in February 1938, he circulated a number of proposals dealing with the Anglo-German appeasement talks. (PRO/371/21555, 1938) In return for a British promise not to 'stab Germany in the back' if attacked from the East, Britain considered asking Germany to grant 'assurances' in regard to Central Europe and to return to the League of Nations. In an earlier memorandum, entitled Annex II 'Draft Despatch to Sir Neville Henderson, Berlin', written in October 1937, Eden proposed a more aggressive approach toward appeasement. One surprising consideration outlined possible British action in the event Germany was attacked by France: 'If a new Western Treaty can be concluded, His Majesty's Government would be ready, in the conditions prescribed in that Treaty, to come to the assistance of Germany in the event of an unprovoked attack upon her by France. Apart from this case, in the event of an unprovoked attack upon Germany, His Majesty's Government would observe neutrality, unless the circumstances were such to produce the application of the provisions of the Covenant against the Power which had attacked Germany.' (Paragraph 13, clause 5) It should be noted, however, that the above proposals were among many circulated within the Foreign Office. These particular proposals were eventually marked: 'Action was suspended, and this draft was not dispatched'.

influence exercised over the BBC by the Foreign Office came as a result of the Corporation's willing cooperation. BBC executives had no illusions about the source of the Corporation's existence and were not so arrogant as to shun their accountability to the public and by extension, the state. They were receptive to criticism and inbred with a self-imposed duty to cooperate with the state.¹⁵

II. The Foreign Office and German grievances

A naval treaty between Britain and Germany and the renewed sense of European instability altered the diplomatic role of the Foreign Office from 1936. The impact of broadcasting featured prominently in the maintenance of Anglo-German relations and the Foreign Office now shifted its focus to broadcasts which exacerbated tension between the two states. From 1936 onwards, German complaints against BBC broadcasts began to arrive regularly at the Foreign Office and the British Embassy in Berlin.¹⁶ Both the Foreign Office and the British embassy increasingly began to lodge their own complaints against BBC news bulletins, usually representing the concerns of German officials. After one BBC broadcast, in 1937, which implied that a retraction made on the part of the German newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, came as a result of 'official' British pressure, the deputy ambassador to Germany, Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes wrote to the Foreign Office that 'this sort of thing tends to undermine the foundations of goodwill he [the ambassador Sir Neville Henderson] has been so successfully building up. It is also an embarrassment to me with my alleged "red" reputation as I had made a good start with Goering.'¹⁷ Another BBC bulletin, in 1938, mentioned a report claiming that Germany

¹⁵ After one offending broadcast in 1934, a member of parliament asked the post-master general 'whether he will order the excision in future of all comments on foreign affairs in the programmes of the British Broadcasting Corporation.' Although the BBC was understood to be an independent organization, the state constantly sought to exert greater control over its broadcasts. PRO FO/395/515 1934, Mr. Boothby (MP) to the House of Commons.

¹⁶ PRO FO 371 18862 1935

¹⁷ PRO FO 395/552 1937, Ogilvie-Forbes to William Strang of the FPO, 10 July 1937. The original report in the *Völkischer Beobachter* stated that Britain was supplying aid to insurgent refugees in Spain. The newspaper retracted the statement after the British embassy made an informal protest on account of the report's inaccuracy. The BBC implied that the retraction came as a result of formal protests.

had sealed her border with Austria although making it clear that the report was only a rumor.¹⁸ A tense Henderson wrote to the Foreign Office in response to the BBC bulletin:

I feel constrained to draw your attention to [the] grave prejudice which can be done to our relations with Germany as well as with other countries [if the] B.B.C. with its heritage of high reputation lends itself to spread by sensation-mongers of fantastic rumours. It is [...] particularly unfortunate that this lapse should have occurred at this juncture on the eve of my conversations with Herr Hitler and of his speech on February 20th.¹⁹

Embassy officials, who were carrying out the agenda of the Foreign Office, complained regularly about the damaging impact of broadcasting on Anglo-German relations. Diplomatic success, they believed, relied on the BBC's conforming to the aims of the Foreign Office. Whether this meant a complete retreat from controversy or simply closer cooperation between the BBC and the Foreign Office was of little consequence. As long as the issue of broadcasting remained high among German grievances against Britain, the Foreign Office would maintain a direct interest in the content of news broadcasting.

The era of aggressive appeasement, begun in late 1937, found the issue of broadcasting playing a significant role in direct German grievances against the British state.²⁰ Control over BBC broadcasting became a major factor in the negotiations leading up to the Munich agreements of 1938. When Lord Halifax visited Germany on a goodwill mission in 1937, he received numerous complaints from German officials protesting the BBC's alleged anti-German bias.[§] Halifax promised Goebbels that he would do his best to insure that the Corporation did not broadcast explicitly anti-Nazi views.[†] According to Scannell, on the eve of the *Anschluss*, Lord Halifax asked the press and the BBC not to make personal attacks on German leaders as this would only contribute to the tense

¹⁸ PRO FO/395/613 1938, Henderson to the Foreign Office, 14 February 1938. It should be noted that the BBC made an attempt to confirm the story with German press officials but failed to receive a reply.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ A 17 February 1938 report in the German newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* protested what it saw as an anti-German bias in the BBC. The publication argued that until 1934 the Corporation handled the German revolution in an objective manner. PRO FO/395/613 1938, Henderson in a report to the Foreign Office, 17 February 1938.

[§] One result of this complaint was that Prime Minister Chamberlain had an internal unit set up to monitor BBC broadcasts.

[†] Halifax was meeting regularly with Sir John Reith by the end of 1937 and made it clear that he opposed broadcasts which offended German officials. see below p. 32

relations between the two nations.²¹ So when the *Wehrmacht* rolled into Vienna, the BBC failed to offer live coverage. In fact, the only coverage given to the *Anschluss* at all was in brief news bulletins.

By 1938, Foreign Office officials were well-versed in the German attitude towards the BBC and were increasingly receptive to their complaints. One official noted: 'Goering [...] told me that Herr Hitler's chief cause for resentment against [the] British press and [the] B.B.C. was that [...] there was no story too wild or improbable [for them].'²² In a meeting with Hitler and Ribbentrop, the British ambassador to Germany, Sir Neville Henderson, also noted that Hitler expressed his concern that the British media had unnecessarily meddled in the internal affairs of Germany.²³ The Foreign Office, in an attempt to mitigate the impact of the BBC on Anglo-German relations, encouraged Henderson to listen receptively to Hitler's complaints.²⁴ Henderson sought to mollify the concerns of German officials at the highest levels, by notifying them of the agreements forged between the Corporation and the Foreign Office.²⁵ During a meeting with Hitler, Henderson confidentially informed the German leader of the efforts made to ensure that unfavorable reports would be minimized. The ambassador informed Hitler that Lord Halifax was to meet BBC officials to emphasize 'the responsibility for peace resting on men in these positions'.²⁶ Henderson also assured Hitler that, unlike the previous foreign secretary, Lord Halifax was much more knowledgeable and understanding of the 'German attitude'.²⁷ Halifax, soon after, met John Reith to discuss an impending BBC feature on German colonial claims. 'The result of the discussion,' noted Halifax 'would probably

²¹ Scannell and Cardiff, p. 82

²² PRO FO/371/21555 1938, Henderson to the Foreign Office, 18 February 1938. on a recent conversation with Goering.

²³ PRO FO/371/21656 1938, Henderson to the Foreign Office, 3 March 1938. He wrote: 'The Chancellor pointed out that for three years [...] complete silence has been observed in Germany in the face of all English attacks. But whereas Germany had never intervened in internal English affairs, Ireland etc. [...] English attempts at intervention [...] had continued uninterruptedly.'

²⁴ AE Sargent of the Foreign Office wrote: 'I hope that Sir N. Henderson will be allowed to say something about the B.B.C., the behaviour of which is one of Hitler's chief and - if I may say so - best-founded grievances.' PRO FO/371/21709, internal Foreign Office minutes, 1 March 1938. He also noted that Henderson should express his agreement with Hitler on this issue.

²⁵ see below p. 40

²⁶ PRO FO/371/21656 1938, Halifax to Henderson, 3 March 1938

²⁷ *ibid.*

have been unfavourable to the German claim.’²⁸ Reith had agreed to cancel the program at Halifax’s strong encouragement. The foreign secretary had asked Henderson to notify Hitler in a subsequent meeting of the Corporation’s actions. ‘I should be glad if you could convey to the Chancellor in confidence intimation of the action taken by the B.B.C. on their own initiative as a token of their desire not to create difficulties,’ he wrote to Henderson. ‘You should at the same time make it clear that the B.B.C. have acted independently.’²⁹ The Foreign Office was determined to minimize the appearance of control over the wireless. The practice of inconspicuous suggestion gave the Foreign Office the advantage of being able to divorce itself publicly from the actions of the Corporation and also to claim indirect credit for the BBC’s restraint. Most important to Foreign Office officials handling the issue of broadcasting, was the elimination of a source of grievance which might hamper diplomatic efforts. In order to do this, the Foreign Office required the complete cooperation of the BBC.

The subsequent section shall examine more closely the relationship between the BBC and the Foreign Office during the interwar period. A highly complex relationship emerges, marked by ambiguity and contradiction. The BBC was never subject to direct censorship during this time. Any, and all, pre-emptive action taken to avoid controversial topics which might exacerbate international or domestic instability came directly from the BBC. That is not to say the Foreign Office did not play a role in helping the Corporation to chart a prudent course. From the earliest BBC reports dealing with Germany, the Foreign Office, and particularly its information wing, the FPO, took a great interest in the way foreign news was disseminated. But at no time during this period did the Foreign Office apply direct pressure over the Corporation to eliminate material which might otherwise complicate international relations. The Foreign Office had a specific agenda and diplomatic officials believed that success depended partially, on BBC cooperation.

²⁸ PRO FO/371/21679 1938, Halifax to Henderson, 4 March 1938

²⁹ PRO FO/371/21679 1938, Halifax wrote the following to Henderson on 4 March 1938: ‘Some months ago the B.B.C. arranged a talk on the German Claim to Colonies in which well-known speakers were to take part for and against [...] In view of the conversations in Berlin I saw Sir J. Reith yesterday who agreed that he would on his own responsibility cancel the arrangement. It was clearly understood between us that there was no question of government intervention. [...] I am most anxious to avoid giving the impression that the Government are attempting to muzzle either the B.B.C. or the press. Our intention is merely to instill a sense of responsibility in difficult and delicate circumstances.’

Without the active and enthusiastic participation of the BBC, the Foreign Office would have been placed in a much more difficult position.

The principle of objectivity dictated the Corporation's approach to news reporting. Never was there an attempt on the part of the Foreign Office to define the editorial standards to which the BBC was to adhere. The BBC approach to news dissemination, one that encompassed the desire to see both sides of an argument, fair-mindedness and sometimes censorship were wholly organic ones, developed within the Corporation.³⁰ Serving the cause of appeasement, both indirectly and directly, required the BBC to formulate strict policy guidelines outlining what was and was not acceptable for broadcast. There is no evidence to suggest that Foreign Office officials threatened the Corporation in any serious manner, nor did it have the power to do so. The BBC played a significant role in helping to carry out the state's official policy of appeasement on its own accord. There is no evidence to suggest that the BBC had any desire to contradict the wishes of the government. The control of foreign news dissemination was voluntary and self-imposed. In many instances, as we shall see, the Corporation exercised great restraint sometimes canceling programs outright that were deemed to be a 'risk' by the Foreign Office or another state agency. To function outside the state's approval was seen by many in the BBC as imprudent and irresponsible. Perhaps the anxiety that motivated a government policy of appeasement prevailed within the walls of Broadcasting House also.

III. Controlling controversy

Early on officials within the Foreign Office began to appreciate the potentially powerful role broadcasting could play in the international arena. BBC broadcasts, after all, served not only the British listening public but were easily accessible on the continent as well. Because most European wireless agencies were controlled largely by the respective state, many foreign listeners and state officials assumed that the BBC was also closely regulated by the state. BBC foreign affairs coverage, as a result, was closely

³⁰ see below pp. 41-52

scrutinized abroad. This foreign perception associated BBC broadcasts with official pronouncements and views. 'The fact that the B.B.C. is ultimately controlled by the Government means that listeners, especially abroad, are inclined to take it for granted that the Government has a certain responsibility for "talks" on public affairs,' argued one Foreign Office official in 1934.³¹ The question of broadcasting, therefore, gained an increasingly important role by 1934 among the internal concerns of the Foreign Office. Before 1935, the rise of political extremism at home caused varying degrees of consternation among Foreign Office officials. Any broadcast perceived as being favorably disposed towards either Soviet or German extremism was vigorously opposed.

The arrangement established between the BBC and the Foreign Office was as complex as the state of Anglo-German diplomacy during the interwar Reich period. In 1934, for example, the Foreign Office complained to the Corporation about a report dealing with the Nazi anti-SA purge for its pro-German bias. By 1937, however, the Foreign Office often expressed its distaste for broadcasts which might portray the German regime in a negative light. But it was not only Anglo-German diplomacy that defined the editorial standard of foreign news. If the Foreign Office remained consistent on one account throughout the 1930s, it was their fear of Communism and the belief that the Corporation devoted far too much broadcast time to pro-Communist reports. The maintenance of international relations and the impact of broadcasting, thus, increasingly became intertwined as the decade wore on. The Foreign Office pursued an agenda whose success, it believed, hinged on cooperation between itself and the BBC. Until 1934, the BBC came into contact with the Foreign Office rarely. In limited exchanges the Corporation consulted the Foreign Office on proposals to broadcast from foreign locations, but little else. Vernon Bartlett, the BBC's first 'foreign correspondent', proposed, in 1933, a series of reports to be given from various European capitals.³² While no official inside the FPO disapproved of the Bartlett trip, many had reservations about his

³¹ PRO FO/395/515 1934, 'Meeting on Broadcasting of News Commentaries and Talks on Foreign Policy', Foreign Office official Willert's comments, 11 April 1934

³² for more on Bartlett, see below pp. 71-73

proposed visit to Moscow.³³ The visit to the Soviet Union, feared one FPO official, 'would in my opinion be eminently undesirable. The BBC have already given the Soviet govt. [sic] too much propaganda.'³⁴ Although Bartlett had also proposed a visit to Berlin which would include interviews with several Nazi leaders, not one FPO official expressed hostility. The main request among FPO officials was to avoid surrendering the microphone to Communist rhetoric. Bartlett agreed not to broadcast the voices of his subjects but to quote their words in his own voice. 'If I do ask for permission to quote their *ipsissima verba*, to select statements which would be pacifying rather than provocative,' he assured the Foreign Office.³⁵ For the time being, the Foreign Office worried little about the wireless and its diplomatic consequences. Any fear among FPO officials relating to the wireless was reserved for broadcasts airing the views of 'extremists', and most particularly, Communist extremists. Foreign office officials, at this time, were concerned more about the domestic impact of these kinds of broadcasts than their international implications.

Until 1935, therefore, virtually all complaints lodged against the BBC emerged solely from the Foreign Office. While at times officials within the Foreign Office complained about a '*Manchester Guardian*' attitude among BBC officials, they were equally concerned about the publicity given to the German state.³⁶ The first major complaint the Foreign Office lodged against the BBC came after a broadcast given by Richard Crossman detailing the Nazi anti-SA purge. Crossman's account was condemned for what the Foreign Office interpreted as its pro-German bias and its lack of critical analysis.³⁷ Foreign Office officials protested Crossman's lack of objectivity and what they

³³ Stan Walker of the Foreign Office called the Moscow trip a 'Tower of Babel Scheme'. PRO FO/395/487 1933, internal FPO minutes, 23 January 1933

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*, Bartlett to Rex Leeper, 15 February 1933

³⁶ PRO FO/395/476 1933, minutes of an FPO meeting, 4 January 1933. '*Manchester Guardian*' was a euphemism for the Foreign Office's belief that the Corporation was far-too sympathetic with the left.

³⁷ This was particularly ironic in light of the fact that Crossman was considered, among his contemporaries, as anything but pro-German. In fact, the Oxford don had a reputation for harboring left-wing views. Even John Reith acknowledged this in his diaries. After a meeting with Crossman on 2 March 1934, the director-general wrote: 'Saw one Crossman, whom Siepmann is putting up for a fairly important job - a Socialist but I liked him.' cited in Anthony Howard, *Crossman: The Pursuit of Power* (London, 1990), 46. Crossman's earlier reports dealing with Germany could even be considered blatantly anti-German. In one 1934 account, predating the anti-SA massacre, Crossman clearly chose a selective

saw as his glorification of the purge.³⁸ 'It has been a personal triumph for Hitler and has proved how completely dependent on him the whole Nazi movement is,' reported Crossman from Berlin. 'What Hitler says is law - and law in a very practical sense; as these events have proved. But it is not only law in the sense of compulsion, but right in the sense of winning universal approval.'³⁹ Crossman's report also featured interviews with various German officials who expressed their support for the purge. 'The very fact that Mr. Crossman expressed no criticism seemed to suggest that he was actually approving the Hitler murders,' wrote one angry Foreign Office official.³⁹ Robert Vansittart at the Foreign Office suggested Crossman's talk was 'rather sickening and not at all objective'.⁴⁰ The significance of the Crossman account, however, was not limited to the Foreign Office's anger over its seemingly pro-Nazi content.

The private row between the two institutions inaugurated a fundamental change in the relationship between the Corporation and the Foreign Office. The change was to include a mutual, and private arrangement between the BBC and the Foreign Office to work in closer cooperation in order to avoid any 'unduly tendentious or ill-informed

cross-section of Germans to interview when he first drew attention to the anti-Semitic face of the German state:

the small shopkeeper told me he backed Hitler because he was against large-scale industry and was going to close down the big Jewish stores which were ruining his trade. an elderly Professor said to me (by the way, I quote his actual words) 'I disagree with most of the party policy, but I do hate the way the Jews got all the jobs before the Revolution [1933], and I just worship the physical and spiritual beauty of Adolf Hitler. He knows we want good Germans in our Universities, not clever intellectuals. (BBC Scripts, Crossman, 'Germany, the Inner Conflict', 7 June 1934)

Crossman saw in the German state an ideological aberration in the context of 1930s Europe. There was something strange about the monolithic nature of the people, he felt, and one which had to be exposed at the most basic level. 'Every time the position [of the Nazis] grew unbearably tense,' he read 'some foreign political or racial issue is found by which the facade of unity can be maintained.' For Crossman, the idea that a consistent element rooted in hatred within the state could bind the people unilaterally - whether it be the 'Jews or the League of Nations' - spoke much about the danger the German state posed. (Crossman, 'The Inner Conflict') This danger, Crossman implied, presented a daunting reality not only for Jews but for Germans whose actions reflected an uncivilized racial ideology.

³⁸ Sir Robert Vansittart of the Foreign Office called the report 'sensation-mongering Hearstliness, man-on-the-spot and red-hot stuff'. PRO FO/395/515 1934, Vansittart in FPO minutes, 5 July 1934

³⁹ It should be noted that the text of Crossman's original broadcast no longer exists at the BBC Written Archive Center. The PRO file, however, quotes the account in depth.

³⁹ PRO FO/395/515 1934, Orme Sargent in minutes of a FPO meeting, 5 July 1934

⁴⁰ PRO FO/395/515 1934, Vansittart in FPO minutes, 4 July 1934

statements which affect international relations'.⁴¹ The irony of the agreement was that although it emerged in the wake of the Crossman account - one perceived as pro-German - the arrangement was eventually to come to secure broadcasts that did not offend German officials. From this point on, the Foreign Office was keen on seeing the BBC adapt its foreign affairs coverage to reflect the current aims of the diplomatic process. So while Foreign Office officials may have condemned the Crossman account as too mild in its criticism of the events taking place in Germany in 1934, a shift in attitude among diplomats was to see the tables turn by 1936. What emerged from the Crossman account and a previous broadcast allowing a German official to denounce the terms of the Versailles treaty was an aggressive attempt, on the part of the Foreign Office, to create an informal arrangement between itself and the BBC.⁴² At the suggestion of Colonel Alan Dawnay, then-BBC controller of programmes, Reith would meet monthly with Robert Vansittart (later Sir) to discuss issues of broadcasting and all texts of talks on foreign affairs were to pass through the Foreign Office before broadcast.⁴³ Reith also commissioned Rex Leeper of the Foreign Office to give the BBC some suggestions on how to handle talks on foreign affairs. Leeper made the following suggestions; either one or two regular speakers, a panel of experts, or reports from foreign capitals.⁴⁴ In addition, at the suggestion of the FPO, all talks manuscripts were to be forwarded to them before broadcast. Any reservations harbored by FPO officials regarding talks content would be vetted from the manuscripts.[†] The repercussions of this agreement were to affect all subsequent BBC broadcasts dealing with foreign affairs. The Corporation, furthermore, was not to make this agreement public and any public responsibility for BBC broadcasts was to fall solely on the Corporation.⁴⁵ The next year, the BBC Annual carried the following statement: 'During the year, controversial broadcasting had

⁴¹ *ibid.*, words of Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon, 5 July 1934. Reith acknowledged many of the criticisms leveled at the Corporation's supposed left-wing bias. In 1937, he told the King that the left-wing bias of news organizations was a 'plague spot'. (McIntyre, 231)

⁴² see below pp. 46-47

⁴³ PRO FO/395/515 1934, it should be noted that news bulletins, which were filtered from Reuters accounts were not vetted by the Foreign Office.

⁴⁴ PRO FO/395/515 1934, FPO minutes, 11 April 1934. also noted in Scannell and Cardiff, p. 70

[†] All talks and interviews were read off manuscripts. Nothing was broadcast over the air unless it was written down and approved.

⁴⁵ Scannell writes that the agreement 'made nonsense of the supposed independence of the BBC.', p. 77

probably diminished. An increasing sense of the potential influence of a broadcast had led to an increasing wariness among interested parties and, within the Corporation, an increasing concern for an adequate representation of as many views as possible.' ⁴⁶

The agreement between the Corporation and the Foreign Office, however, was not without its contradictions. Because the nature of Anglo-German relations fluctuated throughout the first half of the 1930s, the Foreign Office could not stipulate specific guidelines for handling foreign affairs broadcasts. As a result, the BBC Talks department was to interpret Foreign Office wishes in its own way. The concept of objectivity, the first commandment of the Talks department, was to be altered to reflect the implied desire of the Foreign Office. After 1936, objectivity included a strict Corporation policy intent on appeasing its German critics and one whose repercussions were to affect the content of all German news thereafter.

By 1936 the wishes of the Foreign Office and the broadcast policy of the BBC were virtually indistinguishable. The Foreign Office was particularly concerned about issues which touched on contemporary political affairs. What the Foreign Office suggested the Corporation should avoid were talks dealing with the political extremism of the left and right. One suggestion from the BBC, a twelve-part series on 'The Citizen and His Government', in 1935, was to include an installment featuring Sir Oswald Mosley and the well-known British Communist Harry Pollitt. The Foreign Office opposed this particular series mainly on the grounds that it would allow Pollitt an opportunity to address a wide audience. The Foreign Office had mounted several complaints with the Soviet government for filling the British airwaves with pro-Communist propaganda and believed that the Pollitt broadcast might fly in the faces of those protesting against Soviet actions. Reith had the series canceled agreeing not to publicly disclose the intervention of the Foreign Office. ⁴⁷

A similar situation occurred between the Foreign Office and the BBC in 1937 when the Talks department broadcast a talk by John Hilton speaking on Soviet Russia. Hilton's talk was criticized by many in the FPO for being far too sympathetic with the

⁴⁶ *BBC Annual 1935*, p. 86

⁴⁷ Scannell and Cardiff, p. 75

Soviet state.⁴⁸ In the contemporary press, Hilton's speech was denounced as 'left wing propaganda'.⁴⁹ The Foreign Office, which presumably approved the broadcast, reacted to it only after receiving several complaints from both listeners and state officials. Vansittart believed that the issues of Communism and Fascism could not be discussed over the air without 'their taking the form of either polemics or propaganda'.⁵⁰ In a subsequent meeting with Reith, Vansittart suggested that 'in the very difficult and even critical times in which we lived it was most important for the B.B.C. and the Foreign Office to collaborate in every possible way and not in any circumstances to cross the wires.' It would be better, argued Vansittart, if the BBC gave 'no prominence for the next year at least to lectures either on Communism or Nazi-ism'.⁵¹ Reith agreed to comply with Vansittart's suggestion and the Corporation dealt exclusively with the political issues of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, not ideological ones, from this point forward.⁵²

As the efforts to maintain a stable diplomatic relationship with Germany shifted modes, the Foreign Office increased its requests on how to handle news relating to Germany and Nazism. The BBC and the British press, as has been discussed above, were organizations whose power played a significant role in the appeasement talks. So important was the cooperation of the BBC, that the newly-appointed foreign secretary, Lord Halifax, arranged regular meetings with Reith often suggesting that the Corporation should moderate its reports dealing with Germany. Before one meeting, the Foreign Secretary wrote:

I intend to speak to Sir John Reith [...] making it clear that what I am saying is not an instruction from the Government, but merely the expression of a desire on their part that the British Broadcasting Corporation should bear in mind the extreme sensitiveness [*sic*] both of Hitler and Mussolini to British Broadcasting Corporation "talks" and presentation of news in order that difficulties on this score should be eliminated or reduced as far as possible, more especially at a time when

⁴⁸ PRO FO/395/546 1937, Charles Peake at the FPO wrote: 'It has been suggested to me that the fact it being allowed to be made is yet a further example of the B.B.C.'s red proclivities.', 16 March 1937

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, clipping from the *Daily Mail*, 16 March 1937. The original text of the broadcast no longer exists but is quoted in the memorandum.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, Vansittart on a meeting with Reith, 16 March 1937

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² Briggs writes: 'In the last two years of the peace, there were few series of talks which compared in excitement with those of the earlier 1930s, and controversy itself began to seem somewhat *vieux jeu*.' (Briggs, vol. II, p. 139)

an attempt is being made by the Government to negotiate settlements and improve relations.⁵³

For senior officials at the Foreign Office, the question of broadcasting presented a serious matter in which they felt they had to intervene. It was perhaps a testament to the cultural and political strength of the BBC that less than ten years after its incorporation, its impact on Anglo-German diplomatic stability was so significant.

The relationship (and its evolution) between the Corporation and the Foreign Office between 1933 and 1938 reveals both the importance of broadcasting's perception among Foreign Office officials and the often contradictory policies of the diplomatic process. Although it was the Foreign Office that encouraged closer cooperation between itself and the BBC, the Corporation never sought to challenge the nature of the relationship. Serving the cause of appeasement, whether it was a conscious process or not, superseded the highest commandment of BBC news dissemination: to find the truth and tell it. The Corporation developed its own editorial policy on how to handle 'delicate' news items. Often, news editors were much more cautious than FPO officials in what they would and would not permit to be broadcast. It was also comparatively rare for Foreign Office officials to complain to the BBC over manuscript conflicts. The Corporation instituted a system of self-imposed censorship strict enough to pre-empt most complaints. By the middle of the 1930s, the BBC, wrote one historian, became a 'creature of the government'.⁵⁴ It was the Corporation's own editorial control which contributed to the lack of hard-nosed journalism. Because the BBC functioned after 1934, effectively, under the tacit approval of the Foreign Office, there often were 'disturbing gaps' in the way it handled delicate news items.⁵⁵

⁵³ PRO FO/371/21656 1938, Halifax to Henderson, 2 March 1938.

⁵⁴ Alice Goldfarb Marquis, 'Written on the Wind: The Impact of Radio during the 1930s, *Journal of Contemporary History*, volume 19 (1984), 398

⁵⁵ Marquis, p. 399

IV. The practice of appeasement broadcasting

The pressures applied on the Corporation by the Foreign Office were always discreet and always packaged as simple recommendations. As an independent organization, the BBC always maintained complete control over its editorial policy. Neither the success of the Corporation nor its survival hinged on cordial relations with the Foreign Office. Furthermore, recommendations emanating from the Foreign Office were left intentionally vague in the belief that the Corporation cooperated voluntarily, as a responsible organization. The maintenance of diplomatic stability in cooperation with broadcasting was not in the direct interest of the Corporation as a news provider, but most certainly appealed to individuals within Broadcasting House. Those who controlled editorial policy were rarely ideologues and usually keen to support the policies of the state. Men like John Reith and Cecil Graves, the controller of programmes, recognized the importance of their positions and appreciated the contribution they were making to the advancement of mutual understanding, both domestically and internationally. The BBC provided listeners at home with a particular view of their own world and became, by the mid-1930s, a 'central agent of the national culture'.⁵⁶ British broadcasting also offered foreign listeners a window onto the life of Britain. Senior staff at Broadcasting House were well aware of the extent to which their broadcasts reached thousands across Europe daily. They were also made aware of foreign criticism either directly, or through the Foreign Office.

As the relationship between the Corporation and the Foreign Office evolved, BBC staff became increasingly selective as to what could and could not pass for acceptable broadcasting. Just as objectivity marked the content of talks and features, the concept was extended to avoid offending foreign governments. The BBC was particularly keen on appeasing their German critics. The Corporation's role as a cooperative partner with the state meant that the content of foreign news, particularly news coming out of Germany, was highly regulated. The result, of course, meant that the quality and complexity of news

⁵⁶ Scannell and Cardiff, p. 278

analysis suffered. Before one broadcast on Germany, Lionel Fielden wrote to the correspondent:

Owing to the present state of things in Europe, there is a good deal of nervousness on both sides about the possible effects of broadcast talks, and therefore it is really essential that we should have your manuscript at least a couple days beforehand so that we have time to make any modifications we may think necessary, and also so that we are in a position to talk to the German authorities if any difficulty arises at the last moment.⁵⁷

Any news talks that hinted at bias were to be avoided. The news department was particularly cautious about upsetting the Foreign Office and often applied editorial standards in a far stricter manner than required.⁵⁸ Most issues which might present a controversy saw the news department adopting a 'pre-emptory' system of management. By applying strict editorial standards and taking an extremely cautious line, the Corporation would 'pre-empt' any grievances lodged by either the Foreign Office or the German government. After Harold Nicolson submitted his script for one talk on Germany, his editor decided to remove a reference to violent persecution. 'In my opinion,' wrote George Barnes of the Talks department, '[the reference to persecution] should be deleted because we had been asked by the Foreign Office not to mention the crisis [Sudeten Crisis], and it seemed to me that a story in which listeners' sympathy was enlisted against Nazi methods was not keeping to the letter of our promise.'⁵⁹ On the eve of the *Anschluss* the BBC was to run a series entitled 'The Way of Peace'. One panelist, Sir Josiah Wedgwood MP was axed because he wanted to give a list of Hitler's demands and intentions. 'Concrete charges of this sort,' went one memo, 'which are at the most conjecture, ought not to be given the great publicity of the microphone.'⁶⁰ It was better to avoid controversy rather than take a risk which might upset the state or a foreign government. In a 1935 series entitled 'Freedom and Authority in the Modern World',

⁵⁷ BBC WAC, Victor Bodker contributor files, 1932-1962 file I, letter from Lionel Fielden to Bodker, 11 April 1934

⁵⁸ These standards also transcended those of the correspondents themselves. One correspondent, before leaving for Germany to produce a report promised not to 'bring the B.B.C. into disrepute in either Nazi or Fascist circles.' BBC WAC Sir Evelyn Wrench file I, 1932-34, Wrench to Lionel Fielden, 20 April 1933

⁵⁹ BBC WAC Harold Nicolson Files, 3A, 1938, Barnes in an internal BBC memo on Nicolson's manuscript for a talk on the Sudeten Crisis, 5 September 1938.

⁶⁰ Scannell and Cardiff, p. 82

Richard Crossman was replaced with a panelist who 'stands centre-right and would describe the Nazi regime objectively and not unfavourably.'⁶¹ On another proposed speaker for the series about freedom, Siepmann said: 'If Shroedinger is not going to talk against Nazism, but only to discourse on English freedom, there is no objection [to his being invited].'⁶² When one reporter proposed a talk on nationalism, the reply from his producer spoke of the 'danger of riding the internationalism horse a bit too hard [...] with so much national feeling still about, one has got to walk very delicately.'⁶³ After his talk on Germany, Sir Evelyn Wrench was commended by Siepmann noting that the talk was 'just what we wanted at this particular juncture, when nations are so frightened at each other.'⁶⁴ When the BBC did upset a foreign government, Reith could play the double role of unofficial diplomat and BBC representative.

As early as 1933, Reith found himself extending an apology to the Polish ambassador in Britain on behalf of the British government after a New Year's eve report which was received unfavorably in Poland.⁶⁵ Reith was approached by officials at the FPO and it was recommended that he make a formal apology to the Polish government. The director-general complied, expressing his regret at the 'inadvertent' and 'inappropriate' references made.⁶⁶ On the eve of the *Anschluss*, Reith assured the German foreign minister that the 'BBC was not anti-Nazi' after von Ribbentrop suggested otherwise.⁶⁷ The impact of the Corporation and its broadcasts reverberated through official German circles and it was not uncommon for BBC executives to be approached by German diplomats both through official and unofficial channels. A talk on the

⁶¹ BBC WAC R51/188, talks on freedom and authority 1934-35, G.N. Pocock, talks executive, in a memorandum, 11 February 1935

⁶² BBC WAC R51/187, talks freedom 1935-36, Siepmann in internal memorandum, 20 February 1935

⁶³ BBC WAC Sir Evelyn Wrench contributor file I, 1932-34, Fielden to Wrench about the latter's desire to give a talk on nationalism, 20 April 1933

⁶⁴ BBC WAC Sir Evelyn Wrench file I, Siepmann to Wrench, 10 April 1933

⁶⁵ The talk, entitled 'New Year over Europe' featured a broadcaster pretending to walk across the map of Europe, welcoming in the New Year when in actual fact, the broadcast took place in London. While 'broadcasting' from East Prussia, the speaker spoke of the people 'who are separated from the main body of their countrymen by the Polish Corridor'. The report also mentioned that thirty percent of Poland's annual expenditure was reserved for purposes of defense. PRO FO/395/476 1933

⁶⁶ PRO FO/395/476 files 17-26 1933, undated memorandum from Reith

⁶⁷ On the eve of the *Anschluss*, Reith apologized to German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop for a report the latter had objected to. The director-general assured the foreign minister that the 'BBC was not anti-Nazi'. (Marquis, p. 409)

Czechoslovak crisis, broadcast in May of 1938, evoked a sharp rebuke from Dr. Fitzrandolph of the German embassy in London. 'Any talks which we broadcast must not necessarily be taken as representing the views of His Majesty's Government or even of the BBC,' responded Malcom Frost of the BBC public relations department.⁶⁸

As broadcasts often featured attempts to engage in mutual understanding, especially when dealing with German affairs, the news department entered into their own informal relationship with the German RRG. During the interwar period, the BBC and the RRG communicated regularly, often calling for broadcast exchanges and clarifying reports which the one broadcast outfit felt was reported incorrectly by the other. As a result of this informal relationship, the BBC sought to encourage a tone of mutual understanding. As mentioned above, the BBC saw its role as a foreign news provider primarily to help stabilize any outstanding tensions between Britain and Europe. Any expression of opinion or appeal to the listeners usually called upon them to 'show Germany that we want to try to understand the present mentality of the German people'.⁶⁹ Cecil Graves, later to become controller of programmes, visited Germany for a week in August 1934 in order to forge a formal relationship between the two broadcasting outfits. Upon his return, Graves described his private audience with Goebbels and his attendance at a performance of the Hitlerjugend:

The impression left at the end of this function was a mixed one, the mass of uniforms of all kinds, S.S. guards everywhere, the marching and counter-marching of the uniformed Hitlerjugend [...] all took me back to the last time I went to Germany in August 1914. On the other hand the impression created by the singing and dancing of these young people was attractive, fresh and spontaneous and I could not [...] recapture that same dominating militaristic atmosphere of twenty years ago.⁷⁰

Dr. Kurt von Boeckman, director of the RRG's short-wave service, later wrote to Graves on the benefits between 'close cooperation between nations and *rapprochement* between civilised peoples' and spoke of their 'complete harmony of views'.⁷¹

⁶⁸ PRO FO/395/560 1938, Frost to Foreign Office, 17 June 1938

⁶⁹ BBC Scripts, Evelyn Wrench, 'What Germany was Thinking Last Week', 10 April 1933

⁷⁰ BBC WAC E1/744, D.E.F.'s (Cecil Graves) visit to Germany 1934, report on visit

⁷¹ *ibid.*, von Boeckman to Cecil Graves, 11 September 1934. Briggs writes on von Boeckman: 'German short-wave broadcasting [...] was given a high priority inside the *Reichs Rundfunk Gesellschaft*, and his

The visit encouraged BBC representatives to arrange for cultural broadcast exchanges and to develop an informal agreement whereby reports deemed inaccurate would be clarified by the other party. Many of the cultural exchanges included youth discussions and art or book reviews. Often these German broadcasters were given a fairly wide scope under which to express their views. Indeed, even expressions of anti-Jewish sentiment sometimes made their way into these broadcasts:

Already years before the Revolution you could observe how a small group of writers was gradually making headway in its attack against the then prominent type of literature. This group of writers which was supported by publishers with a feeling of public responsibility began to voice its thoughts about the social functions of literature. At an age when literature was preoccupied with the emotions of individuals, frequently those of abnormal character, this new group had to struggle against the advertising powers of publishing companies and influential critics as well as the then patronised authors, categories in which the Jewish element was well represented.⁷²

In another 'cultural exchange', the German youth representative did not hesitate to note: '65 million Germans and only one-half million Jews [...] True democracy wouldn't let that one-half million rule 65 million.'⁷³

In the aftermath of the Munich crisis of 1938, the newly-appointed Director-General, F.W. Ogilvie, proposed a new series of 'talks exchanges' between Britain and Germany which was to be 'a solid contribution to mutual understanding and so to peace.'

⁷⁴ In endorsing Ogilvie's plan, British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax wrote: 'The Germans would have the advantage of stating their views to British listeners, but I consider that the risk of their saying something harmful to be more than outweighed by the advantage of conveying a sober presentation of the British outlook to German listeners.'⁷⁵ In other efforts to bring about a reciprocal understanding between Germany and Britain, the Talks Department often invited pro-Nazi Germans to address British audiences over the wireless. Prior to this proposal, one speaker, Herr von Rhenbaden, denounced the

[von Boeckman's] staff were treated as being of equal importance to those in German home broadcasting.' (Briggs, II, p. 364)

⁷² BBC Scripts, Dr. Ernst Deissmann, 'On Foreign Bookstalls: What Germany is Reading', 20 June 1934

⁷³ BBC Scripts, Ferdinand Winkel and Stephen Taylor, 'European Exchange I: Germany', 4 December 1935

⁷⁴ PRO FO/395/564 1938, memorandum from Ogilvie to the FPO, 28 December 1938

⁷⁵ PRO FO/395/564 1938, internal FPO memo from Halifax, 28 December 1938

Versailles treaty in a such a condemnatory fashion, it inspired an angry Foreign Office official to ask the BBC whether they might like to announce the British point of view on Versailles from the *Reichs Rundfunk Gesellschaft*.[†] Siepmann, in reply to the FPO joked, 'I am afraid the Germans will hardly be willing to offer us equivalent facilities over their wireless system. The world might be a brighter and a safer place if that were possible!'⁷⁶ The Talks department also ran a series entitled 'How Others See Us', most of which allowed for considerable criticism of Britain by foreign speakers. One such talk featured a German Nazi who attacked the policies of Britain and noted how the British had deteriorated as a race by permitting the 'infiltration of foreign elements' into British national life.⁷⁷ One listener expressed his anger with the broadcast in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*:

For a quarter of an hour on Sunday evening the British Broadcasting system was placed at the disposal of a Nazi propagandist, who was kind enough to tell us that although we are not without certain virtues we are really a stupid and decadent race.

In so far as we allow foreigners to use our wireless system for purposes of advertising their own particular brand of politics, we are indeed a stupid people.⁷⁸

The attempt to come to a better understanding of the policies of the Reich also saw many BBC broadcasters draw comparisons between the new 'radical' Germany and stable Britain. British public policy was familiar to listeners and any similarities between what Germany was attempting to accomplish and what conflicts Britain had already resolved provided listeners with the ability to better understand Germany's process of 'renewal'. One account reported: 'He [Hitler] had won over the support of the industrialists for a little Roosevelt recovery scheme of his own. There is to be a forty-hour week, young people will be kept out of the factories by raising the school age, and various other steps are to be taken which, as far as I can see, bear the closest possible resemblance to the aims of our own Labour party.'⁷⁹ Listeners too were informed that they could hold

[†] As the majority of original BBC scripts were lost or damaged during the Second World War, the original text of von Rhenbaden does not survive either in manuscript form or in the *Listener*.

⁷⁶ PRO FO/395/515 1934, letter from Siepmann to Orme Sargent at the FPO, 4 June 1934

⁷⁷ PRO FO/395/546 1937, again, the original script of the broadcast does not survive but significant quotations from the broadcast are drawn in this file.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, a letter from Mr. George Liverman to the *Daily Telegraph*, March 1937.

⁷⁹ BBC Scripts, Vernon Bartlett, 'Indignation is not a Political Attitude', 20 September 1933

personally opposing views toward the repressive measures of the German state but were not in a position to judge them. These were, after all, the internal affairs of Germany. 'We object if foreigners criticise our policy in Ireland or India,' went one report 'still more do the German's object if we criticise the German government's policy toward German citizens.'⁸⁰ Another broadcaster noted: 'I do feel [...] strongly that what we want in the world at present time [...] are people who are ready to listen to what the "other fellow" thinks [and] not what they think he ought to think.'⁸¹ Pleas to 'Germany that we want to try to understand the present mentality of the German people,' often went out over the airwaves.⁸² Passive or 'polite' opposition, furthermore, was encouraged as a preferred form of resistance. While Jewish communities and others in Britain undertook to take concrete measures against Germany (like boycotts), this type of action would only 'harden the heart, and strengthen the position of those whose acts are condemned,' argued one broadcaster.⁸³

Any critical account of the 'new Germany' often went to great lengths to show the effects of the new regime on the population and the economy. Indeed, until the outbreak of war, Germany's transformation was characterized and described as a 'revolution', an example of the adoption of the language of the Nazi party. The enviable qualities of the regime were highlighted with reports dealing with such issues as youth labor camps and military-style training units, describing them as examples of 'German thoroughness'.⁸⁴ 'We have heard so much lately about the misdeeds of the Nazis,' went one account, 'that there is a real danger of their constructive work being ignored [...] there are many lessons for the rest of us to learn from the reorganisation of [Germany].'⁸⁵ These accounts illustrated German industrial and social discipline and economic efficiency. 'Under Hitler,' went one report 'in three years, there has been a very remarkable revival, in Germany, not

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ BBC WAC, Sir Evelyn Wrench file I, 1932-34, Wrench to producer J.A. Ackerley after the talk 'What Germany was thinking last week', 11 April 1933. It should be noted that Wrench was not only a regular broadcaster but the founder of the staunchly pro-appeasement movement, the English-speaking Union.

⁸² BBC Scripts, Wrench, 'What Germany was thinking',

⁸³ BBC Scripts, Lt. Col. Sir Arnold Wilson, 'A fortnight in Germany', 23 May 1934.

⁸⁴ BBC Scripts, S.K. Ratcliffe, 'My glimpse of the new Germany', 31 July 1933.

⁸⁵ BBC Scripts, Sir Charles Petrie, 'The week abroad: highlights in world affairs', 17 May 1933

only of faith and hope and courage, but of industrial activity.’⁸⁶ And while not everything about the new regime could benefit each individual, Germany’s new approach to state organization reflected a positive, quasi-utilitarian model of government. One reporter noted:

I am firmly convinced that far more people are happy under the present German government than under any preceding one [...] if the great majority of the people have new hope, a new feeling of comradeship and all the rest of it, ought a democrat to feel that this greater good for the greatest number should cancel the fact that a small minority is suffering martyrdom for its beliefs?⁸⁷

Often, the Nazi policies of persecution were presented as a by-product of political circumstances and not overt hatred. Broadcasters went to great lengths to stress to their listeners the complexity of the German situation and the difficulty with which the outside world had in understanding their internal circumstances. Bartlett noted:

It is not so easy to be reasonable and tolerant if, like most of the Nazis of today, you have been bewildered first by a war, which you lost; secondly, by a revolution, in which everything you had been taught to respect was overthrown and despised; thirdly, by inflation which completely wiped out all your savings, and fourthly, by a graver unemployment problem than that known in any other European country. Nothing, to my mind can excuse bullying and brutality, but some things can help to explain it.⁸⁸

Another broadcaster pointed out that ‘civil war was avoided by putting Communist leaders in concentration camps.’⁸⁹ The Nazi ‘revolution’ was, after all, a revolution and the repercussions of a revolution often went hand in hand with emergency measures, implied many of the broadcasts. One account pointed out: ‘There seem to be periods of crisis or transition when quick decisions are essential and, consequently, when the ordinary citizen ought to be ready to forget some of his selfish or personal interests for the good of the state.’⁹⁰ The rise of the Nazi movement to power, in addition, was explained as an

⁸⁶ BBC Scripts, John Hilton, ‘Blunders in Berlin’, 8 July 1936

⁸⁷ BBC Scripts, Vernon Bartlett, ‘Foreign Affairs: Dictators and Democracy’, 28 March 1934

⁸⁸ BBC Scripts, Bartlett, ‘Indignation...’

⁸⁹ BBC Scripts, Wilson, ‘Fortnight’

⁹⁰ BBC Scripts, Bartlett, ‘Dictators and Democracy’

almost inevitable process, one which came 'partly [out] of the sufferings and repression of nearly twenty years'.⁹¹

From the beginning of the Nazi regime, presenters sought to strip away Hitler's hard veneer and portray his position as a complex one, but one which ultimately benefited the people. Most broadcasters also believed Hitler's rhetoric would tone down with time. He was viewed in much the same way other dictators were viewed and his approach to government was interpreted as one not too far from those of Mussolini, Stalin and even Dolfuss. The picture that early emerged was of a man struggling to bring his country back to a dignified position. One report noted:

Being himself the son of a peasant [...] Hitler is a great believer of the physical and moral effects on the land. Furthermore, since this compulsory labour will affect young German of every class, he will get rid of social barriers just as they were got rid of during the War.

I am afraid we shall need much patience and sympathy, but there is a lot of good in the Nazi movement and it is very much to our interest that somehow he [Hitler] should bring it out.⁹²

It was not uncommon to portray Hitler in a positive light and when his policies seemed to defy rationality, like the destruction of 'degenerate artwork', reports often came to his defense. 'At least he [Hitler] honours art to the extent of believing that its misuse can encompass the cultural destruction of a people; and equally that when purged and healthy it can be the greatest agent in national regeneration,' said one art review.⁹³

The relationship between the BBC and the RRG and its direct impact on broadcast policy regarding German news, however, should not be overstated. It is significant, though, that executives within the Corporation could express personal hostility toward Germany's anti-Jewish policy, while at the same time this had no direct impact upon the relationship with the RRG. When the BBC produced slightly flawed reports on the Jewish situation in Germany, the RRG was quick to point out the error, and the clarification was appreciated by the Corporation. After a somewhat inaccurate BBC broadcast relating to

⁹¹ BBC Scripts, Sir Arthur Salter, 'The week abroad: the Nazi revolution', 15 March 1933

⁹² BBC Scripts, Vernon Bartlett, 'The week abroad: The Austro-German contretemps', broadcast from Vienna on 22 June 1933

⁹³ BBC Scripts, Herbert Read, 'Hitler on art', 22 September 1937

war pensions, von Boeckman felt comfortable enough to write the BBC, courteously pointing out a flaw in the report:

We should [like] to point out that the item on your news bulletin: 'Jewish officials must resign by the 31st of December of this year. If they fought in the War, they will receive a pension.' although correct, was not exhaustive. All Jewish officials resigning on the 31st December will receive pensions, irregardless whether they served during the war or not. Those Jews, however, who served with the German colours during the war until they reach the age-limit will even receive full pay and thereafter a pension.'

The actual item of news transmitted by us is attached for your information.

Your item aporaining [*sic*] to the definition of Jews might also lead to misapprehensions:

'A Jew is defined as being anybody with three or four Jewish grandparents, or anybody who is married to a Jew, or has certain other Jewish connexions.'

In another of our bulletins we stated:

'A man is a Jew before the law if he has at least three Jewish grandparents. A person with two Jewish grand parents is considered to be of mixed descent. Anyone descending from two Jewish grand parents is also regarded as being of mixed Jewish blood under the following circumstances: that he either belonged to the Jewish religious community at the time when the law was passed or joined that Jewish religious community after the law was passed. If the person of mixed blood was married to a Jew at the time the law was accepted or married a Jew after the law became known.'

Before the law, therefore, a Jew is not 'anybody who is married to a Jew' as you put it, but 'a person of Jewish descent married to a Jew at the time the law was passed or married to a Jew after the law was published.'⁹⁴

What is particularly interesting about the above correspondence relating to this specific news bulletin is how the 'flaw' is treated in such a pedantic manner by the Corporation. There was no attempt to verify the accuracy of von Boeckman's claim by the controller of programmes and the mistake was treated as a routine news error. Von Boeckman's first clarification, however, was misleading and not totally accurate.⁹⁵ And while it was not uncommon for news organizations to correspond on matters relating to reporting

⁹⁴ BBC WAC E1/760/1, countries: Germany: German short-wave service file I: 1933-1945, letter from von Boeckman to Graves, 26 November 1935

⁹⁵ Article IV, Section 2 of the Reich Citizenship Law states: 'Jewish officials will retire as of 31 December 1935. If these officials served at the front in the First World War, either for Germany or her allies, they will receive in full, until they reach the age limit, the pension to which they were entitled according to the salary they last received; they will, however, not advance in seniority. After reaching the age limit, their pensions will be calculated anew, according to the salary last received, on the basis of which their pension was computed.' (Noakes and Pridham, p. 466)

inaccuracies, von Boeckman's frank clarification reflected the accessibility of the information pertaining to the anti-Semitic features of the Nazi state. It should be noted that the Corporation carried the original report in a standard news bulletin and no attempt to analyze the implications of the law was made either in a talks form or otherwise. In his reply, Graves thanked von Boeckman 'for letting us know the full facts'.⁹⁶ The subsequent BBC news bulletin carried the revised information von Boeckman provided. The principle of objectivity and the desire to forge a 'mutual understanding' would have the BBC handle the gaffe in no other way. These ideals were consistently applied to broadcasts dealing with Germany.

V. The Foreign Office, the 'Jewish Question' and the BBC

This discussion, so far, has provided the background necessary to understand the issues raised in the second half. How did the complex relationship between the Foreign Office and the BBC impact on the reporting of anti-Jewish measures in Nazi Germany? The connection between the Corporation's careful regulation of news content relating to Germany meant that detailed information about the anti-Jewish crisis suffered as well. Perhaps the most compelling factor in relating news about anti-Jewish persecution was that it never emerged as a contentious issue between the BBC and the Foreign Office. The culture in which the Foreign Office and the BBC operated reflected the attitude they took both toward persecution and its broadcast coverage.⁹⁷ Throughout the 1930s, the Foreign Office received detailed information concerning the plight of German Jews from its embassy in Berlin. The issue never played a role in the policy matters relating to appeasement and the British government remained virtually silent on the matter throughout the 1930s.⁹⁸ 'H.M.G. are not and ought not to be the protectors of the

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, reply from Graves to von Boeckman, 30 November 1935

⁹⁷ for more on cultural and social values, see below pp. 62-67

⁹⁸ One frustrated Jewish constituent wrote to Prime Minister Baldwin in 1935: 'Not one word has been publicly spoken by you to express the indignation and horror [...] at the cruel and relentless persecution of my co-religionists in Germany.' PRO FO/371/18863 1935, a 'Conservative [party] Jew' to Baldwin, 3 November 1935

Jewish people,' wrote one diplomatic official in 1935.⁹⁹ Just as the Foreign Office discouraged the BBC from producing reports offensive to Germany, it saw the Jewish crisis as an internal and political problem of Germany and one which should not be dealt with in depth. Chief among their concerns regarding the Jewish 'problem' was the issue of refugees, the status of which officials never fully recognized.¹⁰⁰ Palestine was another example and by 1936, the British government believed that it was 'not a suitable place for any substantial additional number of Jewish refugees.'¹⁰¹

Unlike the public, the Foreign Office was made aware of the extent of persecution and the degree to which anti-Semitism existed in Germany. As early as March 1933, the British Ambassador to Berlin, Sir Horace Rumbold, had written to the Foreign Office of the 'gross injustice' done to the Jews.¹⁰² By the time the reverberations of official anti-Semitism prompted thousands of German Jews to seek refuge in Britain, the secretary of state for home affairs feared a 'risk that the influx [...] from Germany may include a certain number of Communists.'¹⁰³ Although barely 3,000 refugees trickled in by the end of 1934, the question of Jewish immigration into Britain weighed heavily on the minds of Foreign Office officials.¹⁰⁴ The Foreign Office, in 1933, had considered imposing visa restrictions on German Jews entering Britain but realized that it could not be done without imposing visa restrictions on the entire German community.¹⁰⁵ To carry out a selective entry policy would be an admission of Jewish distinctiveness and the Foreign Office

⁹⁹ PRO FO/371/18859 1935, Eric Mills, commissioner for migration and statistics for the Palestine government, to the Foreign Office on his impressions of making a formal pronouncement against the actions of the Nazi state, undated in 1935. Mills, presumably, wrote this observation before embarking on a visit to Nazi Germany in November 1935. His report stated: 'While before I went to Germany I knew that the Jewish situation was bad, I had not realised as I do now, that the fate of German Jews is a tragedy, for which cold, intelligent planning by those in authority takes rank with that of those who are out of sympathy with the Bolshevik regime, in Russia; or with the elimination of Armenians from the Turkish empire. The Jew is to be eliminated and the state has no regard for the manner of his elimination.' in Martin Gilbert, *Exile and Return: The Emergence of Jewish Statehood* (London, 1978), 163-4

¹⁰⁰ Louise London, 'Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940' in David Cesarani (ed.), *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford, 1990), 163. London writes that even in the most violent days of anti-Jewish persecution, the problem of refugees for the government remained an immigration problem rather than a duty to rescue.

¹⁰¹ Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, p. 164

¹⁰² *ibid.*, 157

¹⁰³ PRO FO/372/2949 1933, Sir John Gilmour in a report to the home secretary, 18 April 1933

¹⁰⁴ Marion Berghahn, *German-Jewish Refugees in England* (London, 1984), 75

¹⁰⁵ PRO FO/372/2949 1933, report on a committee meeting by Charles Dodd, first secretary, Foreign Office, 18 April 1933.

throughout the 1930s was hostile to viewing the Jewish crisis in any other way than the internal concern of Germany. '[Jews] have left Germany because they have been persecuted, but they are not technically refugees,' wrote one Foreign Office official. 'It is only stateless persons who are regarded by the League organisations as refugees, then German nationals who happen to be Jews do not fall within their competence. Any reference to the League in connection with this question [the influx of Jewish refugees] would therefore be, not within the technical sphere, but purely political.'¹⁰⁶ The Foreign Office shared the commonly-held view that an increase in Jewish refugees would result in an increase of anti-Semitism at home. In April 1938, the Home Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare stated: 'If a flood of the wrong type of immigrants were allowed in there might be a serious danger of anti-Semitic feeling being aroused in this country. The last thing which we wanted here was the creation of a "Jewish problem".'¹⁰⁷

When the Foreign Office was pressed to encourage the BBC and other media organizations to publicize the anti-Jewish crisis in 1935, the response was less than enthusiastic. Geoffrey Pyke, a leading member of the Anglo-Jewish community and described by Rex Leeper as one who 'is fully akin to the defects as well as merits of his fellow Jews,' argued that references to anti-Jewish persecution should not be omitted from broadcasts.¹⁰⁸ He also argued that anti-Jewish persecution should be mentioned in the same breath as that of Catholics and Protestants. He pointed out that there was, what seemed like, a willful disregard of anti-Jewish persecution in the British media. One Foreign Office official wrote that members of the British government should 'abstain from public criticism of the internal affairs of another country.'¹⁰⁹ Another argued that 'we have more than enough difficulties with Germany already without involving ourselves in matters on behalf of people who are after all German citizens.'¹¹⁰ After brief consideration, the Foreign Office concluded that they would not encourage the

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, Charles Dodd in Foreign Office internal notes, 'Admission to United Kingdom of Jewish Refugees from Germany', 6 April 1933

¹⁰⁷ Sir Samuel Hoare quoted in Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (London, 1992), 279

¹⁰⁸ PRO FO/371/18861 1935, Leeper in internal memorandum, 27 May 1935

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, JP Perowne, of the Foreign Office, in internal minutes, 29 May 1935.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, unnamed respondent in same internal FO minutes

Corporation to publicize the Jewish situation alongside the anti-Christian persecution. JP Perowne of the Foreign Office wrote:

On the merits of the case [Pyke's memo] the persecution of Jews is just as reprehensible no doubt as the persecution of any other set of people, but Jews in Germany today are not being persecuted for quite the same reasons as are Protestants and Catholics. The latter are being persecuted because they hold religious [his underline] views which may in the view of the state prevent them from doing their duty as Germans first and foremost; the Jews are being persecuted on racial [his underline] grounds [...] His Majesty's Government cannot [...] be held to have any obligation to help German Jews resist German "ferocity" today.¹¹¹

The Foreign Office was also able to justify its decision based on the belief that it would only worsen the situation for Jews in Germany. 'Formal representations to Germany would have unpleasant consequences certainly for Jews in Germany and perhaps for states making those representations' wrote one Foreign Office official in 1935.¹¹²

The decision to avoid publicizing detailed accounts of anti-Jewish persecution as an example of Nazi brutality was motivated implicitly by diplomatic factors relating to any negative publicity against Germany. The decision opposing the association, in the media, between anti-Jewish persecution and anti-Christian persecution was motivated by the perception of Jews as 'lesser' victims. To accept the belief that Jewish suffering should be viewed in the same light as any other kind ran counter to the social and cultural instincts of those in the Foreign Office who interpreted the events. The Foreign Office, further, was eager to encourage the BBC to promote 'mutual understanding' between nations. Broadcasts dealing with the topics of anti-Jewish persecution, or political matters relating to the condition of Jews in Germany (believed the Foreign Office) would serve to exacerbate Anglo-German differences. The Jewish crisis failed to trigger the sympathies of those in the Foreign Office because they were preoccupied with diplomacy. The diplomatic process superseded universal humanitarian principles and Foreign Office officials, along with BBC representatives, never felt compelled to carry out the task of addressing anti-Jewish persecution. The following example gives an indication of how far

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, Perowne in minutes, 29 May 1935

¹¹² PRO FO/371/18859 1935, dispatch from Eric Mills, of the Palestine office, to the Foreign Office, undated in 1935

the policies of the Foreign Office were carried out by the BBC and illustrates the real source of restraint: the BBC.

Coverage of the 1936 Olympic Games was to be the BBC's first major opportunity to take advantage of technological innovations in wireless communication and provide up-to-the-minute updates on the sporting developments happening in Berlin. For over a year leading up to the Games, BBC representatives corresponded regularly with their counterparts at the RRG arranging broadcast studios and working out details concerning coverage of the Games. Any concerns over political circumstances in Germany rarely entered into the internal discussion of how to broadcast the Games. This was, after all, an event which dealt solely with athletic competition and no local human interest stories (which are a regular feature of modern Olympic coverage) were considered as part of the broadcasts. BBC coverage was to focus completely on sporting events and it would give the Corporation a chance to improve upon the performance of the printed press by providing live coverage. The Sports division (still under the command of the News department), was keen to supply high quality sports coverage and analysis and this would require highly skilled commentators. A gold medalist in the 1924 Olympics, Harold Abrahams was also the Corporation's most popular and widely respected sports commentator.[†] Abrahams, however, was Jewish and over the course of three months, executives debated on the prudence of sending Abrahams to Berlin as the BBC's representative. One director wrote:

You will remember that at a Programme Board meeting in the late autumn we discussed the advisability of using Mr. Harold Abrahams as our commentator at the Olympic Games. It was then felt that while we were not prejudiced against him for racial reasons, it might be advisable to postpone a final decision as to his employment by us until nearer the time, when we should be able to see the state of feeling in Germany, and the consequent probability of their differentiating against him in the manner of facilities.¹¹³

[†] Harold Maurice Abrahams (1899-1978) was the first European to win an Olympic gold medal in the 100-meter dash. Abrahams' Olympic achievement is chronicled in the film *Chariots of Fire* (1982). As far as I am aware, no biography has been written on his life.

¹¹³ BBC WAC, R47/578/1 (2), Relays: Olympic Games 1936 Berlin, memorandum from DOB (director of broadcasting) to CP (controller of programmes), 5 December 1935

The Abrahams crisis represented the BBC's approach to any issue which might be of a delicate nature. It was the hallmark of the BBC's internal, self-imposed policy of extreme prudence, particularly in relation to Jews and Germany. While executives had legitimate concerns over the treatment Abrahams might encounter in Germany, it was far more important to respect the presumed wishes of the German officials. The controller of public relations wrote:

The point about this is, of course, that Abrahams is a Jew. He is our best commentator on athletics. The question arises as to whether or not we should do this [label Abrahams as a commentator]. We all regard the German action against the Jews as quite irrational and intolerable and on that score we ought not to hesitate, but should we, as between one broadcaster and another, put aside all views of this kind and take the line that however irrational we regard another country's attitude to be it would be discourteous to send a Jew commentator to a country where Jews are taboo? ¹¹⁴

The committee's final decision against sending Abrahams ('it would be definitely impolitic for us to send Abrahams as our official commentator') illustrated the complex nature of the Corporation during the 1930s. ¹¹⁵ While on the one hand, radio represented innovation and technological progress, the BBC trod delicately between the path of principle and prudence, the latter almost always taking precedence. In this case, to send Abrahams was far too great a public relations risk.

In part two, the discussion shall focus on how the anti-Jewish crisis was broadcast. The connection between the Corporation's participation in the state's appeasement strategy and the way German news was handled bore indirectly on the way the Jewish crisis was handled. While there were few instances to suggest that the BBC directly censored this kind of information, its dissemination was an indirect victim of the Corporation's policy relating to German news. Most importantly, however, there is no evidence to suggest that the Corporation ever encouraged the publicity of the anti-Jewish events in Germany.

The cultural climate in which the Corporation operated helps to explain why the anti-Jewish crisis was not viewed as particularly pressing. European diplomatic instability

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, memorandum from Gladstone Murray, controller of public relations, to Cecil Graves, controller of programmes, 6 December 1935

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, memorandum entitled 'commentator for the Berlin Games', 10 February 1936

weighed far heavier on the minds of the British public. Anxiety over the prospect of a forthcoming war also motivated the prudent course of the Corporation during the 1930s. Above all, the attitudes held by many towards the anti-Jewish persecution, (which can be related directly to the inherent latent anti-Semitism of interwar Britain), believing it constituted a somewhat justifiable form of political and economic persecution, did not require the BBC to feature the situation in Germany prominently. The next part deals with these social attitudes and how they encouraged the widespread ambivalence toward the anti-Jewish crisis - an ambivalence which was reflected in the lack of detailed broadcast coverage given to the situation.

PART II
THE BBC, JEWS AND NAZI PERSECUTION

What is all knowledge too but recorded experience,
and a product of history; of which, therefore,
reasoning and belief, no less than action and
passion, are essential materials?

Thomas Carlyle

On 25 March 1933 the *Daily Express* published the banner headline 'Jews Unite in Move to Boycott Germany'.¹ The opening paragraph read: 'Fourteen million Jews, dispersed throughout the world, have banded together as one man to declare war on the German persecutors of their co-religionists.' Only a month earlier, the same daily carried a series of 'easy-to-understand' versions of Christian Bible stories for children. The stories were touted as 'eminently suitable for filling up that difficult half-hour before bed-time.' The first installment featured the story of the lame beggar cured by Peter and John. The two Apostles were described as men who joined Christ before he was 'put to death by the cruel Jews.'² The period which inaugurated the greatest crisis world Jewry was to confront found the Anglo-Jewish community in a position where the plight of their co-religionists was not to find an overwhelmingly sympathetic response from their fellow countrymen. The *Daily Express* headline was to set the tone for the way in which the anti-Jewish persecution was perceived by the BBC during the 1930s and implicitly expressed to the public. The social subconscious in Britain seemed to support the perception that in Germany, Jews constituted a 'united' threat against the Nazi regime.

The way that the anti-Jewish crisis in Germany was perceived among the British public was related to the way in which it viewed Jews. The Jews were regarded by many as a great and powerful force, equal to that, perhaps, of a nation. Few people in Britain openly supported the brutality of the Nazi persecution and even fewer fully understood its extent. The sources from which the majority of the public formed its opinions varied in the extent of their coverage of the crisis and this contributed to the widespread misunderstanding over the nature of persecution. By the time the Nazi regime came to power, the level of traditional anti-Semitism in Britain had reached an ebb. Mass perceptions of Jews, however, altered the common focus of persecution away from the perpetrators and towards the 'causes' of persecution.³ The general idea was that if the

¹ PRO FO/371/16720 1933, clipping from the *Daily Express*, 25 March 1933

² quoted in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 February 1933

³ Kushner, p. 37 He writes: '[The] search for rationality in Nazi anti-Semitism was to occupy the thoughts of many in the liberal democracies in the first years of Nazi rule. One solution was, despite the virulence of the Nazi assault, to cling to the liberal formula and see German actions as exaggerated, unjust, but understandable reactions to a real Jewish irritant.'

Jews were being subjected to some form of persecution, there must necessarily be a rational explanation behind it.

As the great interpreter of common culture, the BBC viewed the crisis in much the same way. The BBC was, after all, a medium which reflected the society in which it developed. It did not reshape it.⁴ Asa Briggs has written: 'The historian has less difficulty in interpreting the institution than in interpreting the society in which it developed.'⁵ This insight becomes all the more accurate when attempting to interpret the social and cultural attitudes held in Britain toward the Jewish community, and the crisis in Germany. As far as the BBC was concerned, the anti-Jewish crisis was a political problem and one which constituted an internal affair of Germany's. For the general public, it was seen largely as an economic problem complicated by Germany's revolution. For the Foreign Office, the anti-Jewish crisis was no concern of the British government and one which did not require an official response. The way in which all three of these bodies, the BBC, the public and the Foreign Office perceived the anti-Jewish crisis was related to the way in which the Corporation chose to handle the situation. This final part is an attempt to connect a common perception of Jews - a 'socially anti-Semitic' one if you like - and the anti-Jewish persecution, and its impact on how the BBC covered the situation. There was, as we shall see, a major discrepancy in what was going on in Nazi Germany and what was being reported by the BBC. The social climate of 1930s Britain determined the perceived importance of the anti-Jewish crisis. For a significant proportion of the British audience, it was to prove of secondary importance. For the Corporation, this ambivalence and the political reality of 1930s diplomacy translated into vague broadcast coverage. The BBC never gave any indication that they wanted to publicize these events in greater depth.

I. Social anti-Semitism

In Britain, by the end of the 1930s, it was anathema to hold violent views toward the Jewish community. Those who openly espoused violent anti-Semitism were largely

⁴ Briggs, vol. II, p. 7

⁵ *ibid.*, 13

peripheral figures. Even Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, which attracted a considerable amount of support from the urban middle-classes, never succeeded politically.⁶ As an ideology, anti-Semitism singularly failed to gain wide appeal as a political mobilizer.⁷ The predominant liberal outlook of the 1930s required individuals to tolerate Jews and others who made an effort to conform to the dominant values of British society.⁸ The small Jewish community in Britain functioned in a social environment which presented no official obstacles to their advancement. Jewish representation existed in many public institutions. But although Anglo-Jews were not legally restricted from taking high military posts, civil service commissions or other official roles, there was enough latent anti-Semitism in Britain to obstruct no more than token Jewish representation in many public spheres.⁹

Because the concept of social anti-Semitism is largely intangible, any definition relies exclusively on the perception of Jews among the British public. Unlike the conscious and even violent anti-Semitism of the late nineteenth century, social anti-Semitism was a far more unconscious attitude, one which drew associations between Jews, economic power and racial stereotypes.¹⁰ It also distinguished Jews from Englishmen. Kushner writes: 'The cultural framework of "Englishness" [...] determined reactions and responses of the [British public] to the persecution of the Jews.'¹¹ The boundaries of a liberal society, one which embraced the concept of toleration, were limited. Toleration came at a price and one which was limited to the tolerance of those individuals who integrated fully into British culture. Bill Williams characterized this

⁶ Alderman, p. 284

⁷ Lebzelter writes: 'The lack of support for political anti-Semitism [was not] due to a rejection of the anti-Semitic message as such, given that three-quarters of the total population were considered to maintain hostile, deprecatory, or at least unfavourable attitudes towards the Jews in Britain.' p. 34

⁸ Bill Williams, 'The Anti-Semitism of Tolerance', in Alan J. Kidd and K.W. Roberts (eds.), *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, 1985), 74. Williams writes that the Jews had to 'live up to the ideals expected of them.', p 77

⁹ George Orwell, 'Anti-Semitism in Britain', *Contemporary Jewish Record* (April 1945), 384. also, Gisela Lebzelter argues that latent antisemitism was widespread in Britain during the interwar years. p. 34 One contemporary writer wrote in hindsight: 'Antisemitism was in the air: an unmistakable tang.' p 218 in Holmes from *the Thirties* by Muggeridge

¹⁰ for more on nineteenth century British anti-Semitism, see Colin Holmes, *Antisemitism in British Society 1876-1939* (New York, 1979)

¹¹ Kushner, p. 20

phenomena as the 'anti-Semitism of tolerance'. The subject of social anti-Semitism, or the 'anti-Semitism of tolerance' is complicated by its ambiguity. Jews occasionally were victims of anti-Semitic violence in Britain but as a community, they enjoyed the same rights and privileges as any other minority group. Common attitudes towards Jews have been divided by Kushner into two main arguments. The first, a 'bifurcated' view, held that there were both 'good' Jews and 'bad' ones. Good Jews were seen as those who assimilated properly, were patriotic and honest. 'Bad' Jews were those who were not integrated, often foreign and financially exploitative.¹² This representation found expression in the way individuals often described their own attitudes toward Jews. '[The Jews] had better stop being Jews and start being human beings,' wrote George Bernard Shaw in 1933. 'I am not in favour of the Jews being a separate entity. They should assimilate with the rest of the people among whom they dwell.'¹³ The second perception held that anti-Semitism was a result of Jewish behavior. 'In a post-emancipatory society,' writes Kushner, 'anti-Semitism was deemed, ultimately, to be the fault of the Jews.'¹⁴ This 'well-earned' anti-Semitism held that Jews made themselves conspicuous as a result of their behavior, particularly in their business dealings. George Orwell spoke about the hypocrisy inherent in British society where an individual usually felt anti-Semitism to be unacceptable but to dislike Jews was not unacceptable.¹⁵

A 1938 Mass-Observation poll taken on behalf of the Board of Deputies concluded that the extent of anti-Semitism in Britain was far-reaching.[§]

In this report we see the almost unanimous angle of these reports. Over and over again the Observer states that the area isn't anti-Semitic, goes on to show that secretly he or she is. And this is equally true of working class, middle class and upper class Observers, for all ages, sexes, areas, occupations, political views, educational standards. Many are ashamed of their covert hostility. Many who are

¹² *ibid.*, 36

¹³ quoted in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 February 1933

¹⁴ Kushner, p. 55

¹⁵ Orwell, p. 384

[§] The poll was taken by Tom Harrison's Mass-Observation Center and conducted over a period of three months on over 2,000 people nationwide. The survey consulted individuals from all classes, sexes, ages, etc. The respondents remained anonymous but sometimes a description was added as to the level of their education, their class or their political leaning.

openly pro-semitic, Communists, etc., nevertheless confess a secret contempt or dislike.¹⁶

The bifurcated view of Jews found many respondents commenting on their personal hostility to the concept of anti-Semitism but also expressing their own contempt for certain features about Jews, which they believed, characterized the entire community. Even the eminent statesman, Harold Nicolson expressed a somewhat contradictory view when he stated: 'The Jewish capacity for destruction is really illimitable. Although I loathe anti-Semitism, I do dislike Jews.'¹⁷ Jews were widely viewed as a monolithic community, well-organized and powerful. 'A sort of free-masonry exists between them (they are a very clannish race) [and] they always favour each other,' noted one Mass-Observation respondent.¹⁸ Another respondent argued that 'As a race, they have always been fighting against the rest of the world and have done brilliantly.'¹⁹ Many respondents also expressed their dislike of the Jewish community as a whole, but not as individuals. 'I do not like the Jewish race as a whole,' wrote one typical respondent, 'though I have a few Jewish friends whom I like very much.'²⁰

This is not to say that the overwhelming majority of British people did not hold hostile views towards Nazi brutality. Those looking for answers to the policies of the Nazi regime often concluded that the Jewish community, perhaps, represented a cohesive threat against Nazism. The focus of many people was not so much on the policy of the Nazis but on the Jews and what they could possibly be doing to cause so much hatred.²¹ The fact that Jews were often associated with financial dominance and conspiratorial monopolies confirmed for many the belief that certain measures might be necessary to help break-up any unfair Jewish control. One prominent merchant banker noted: 'Hitler's handling of the Jewish question has [...] been his greatest mistake. That he was justified in reducing the Jewish control in certain trades and professions even the best Jews in

¹⁶ Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex, Falmer (hereafter MOA), File A12, December 1938: Anti-Semitism Survey

¹⁷ quoted from Nicolson Diaries in Lebzelter, p. 34

¹⁸ MOA, files 40-79, respondent was described as a 'very ordinary man'

¹⁹ *ibid.*, no description for the respondent

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Kushner, 36

Germany themselves admit, but it should have been done in a very different way. There was no need to insult the whole Jewish race.’²² The belief went that if the Jewish community dominated particular economic spheres, then it was not unreasonable for the German government to intervene. The violent methods employed by the Nazi regime were widely misunderstood and the impression, among the British public, was that like any ‘responsible’ government, the German government was attempting to ‘clean-up’ the market in order to create a level economic playing field. If the Jews were to dominate industry in Britain as they did in Germany, argued a Mass-Observation respondent, ‘we will rise against the Jews on our own account and kick them out of the country.’²³

The perception of Jews as a powerful community had significant implications on the way the German anti-Jewish crisis was understood throughout Britain. For most people in Britain, the humanitarian crisis in Germany was not a priority. The anti-Jewish persecution did not find a particularly receptive response from the British public largely because of the complexity of the German situation and partly, because of their own lingering perceptions of Jews. Any representation of Jews as innocent and defenseless victims contrasted with the view, in Britain, of Jewish power and wealth.²⁴ The association between anti-Semitism in Germany and the increasing exclusion of Jews in German society was perceived as one emerging from an economic backlash, and by extension a political one. It was common to draw associations between Jews and financial power or exploitation. Many pulp novels of the time featured a character of Jewish descent who was invariably involved in a financial racket.²⁵ Winston Churchill asked a friend of Hitler’s in 1932: ‘Why is your chief so violent about the Jews? I can quite understand being angry with the Jews who have done wrong or are against the country, and I understand resisting them if they try to monopolize power in any walk of life; but what is the sense of being against a man simply because of his birth? How can a man help how he is born?’²⁶ Churchill’s sentiments were widely shared by the majority of people in

²² quoted from Ernest Tennant journal entry, June 1934 in Kushner, 39

²³ MOA, files 40-79

²⁴ Kushner, p. 40

²⁵ Holmes, pp. 212-13

²⁶ quoted in Kushner, 37

Britain and this view enabled the average individual to go so far in trying to 'make sense out of' Germany's repressive measures without agreeing with them. This line of reasoning often found people expressing their own intolerance along with an opposition toward violent persecution and even anti-Semitism. After *Kristallnacht*, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain wrote: 'No doubt Jews aren't a lovable people; I don't care for them myself but that is not sufficient to explain the pogrom.'²⁷ Just as the respondents in the Mass-Observation poll expressed sentiments hostile to the Jewish community as a group, many also viewed the anti-Jewish persecution in a similar manner. 'I don't mind the thought of the Jews being persecuted as a race,' wrote one respondent, 'but I do mind when I think of them as individuals.'²⁸

The sentiment of the average person expressed toward Jews, as discussed, was both highly complex and highly contradictory. The only tangible conclusion that can be reached relies on an ambiguity of sentiment. The conclusion, therefore, points to a Britain which, at its best, was ambivalent toward, sometimes sympathetic and lacked an understanding of the plight of the German-Jewish community and, at its worst, wholly unsympathetic. On a humanitarian level, most people opposed violence and persecution but when considered alongside the social circumstances of 1930s Britain, most people believed the German anti-Jewish situation to be of no consequence to Britain. Public attitudes permeated institutional ones and fostered a culture in which the problems of the German-Jewish community failed to inspire widespread sympathy. The development of this culture was rooted partly in misunderstanding and partly in the social anti-Semitism of British society. This was the culture in which the BBC operated.

II. Assessing early examples of persecution

Like other major upheavals happening across Europe, many within the Talks department of the BBC saw the political situation in Germany as one which inaugurated a

²⁷ *ibid.*, 55

²⁸ MOA, files 40-79, respondent described as the daughter of left-wing writer Naomi Mitchison

fundamental shift towards order and renewal. For most broadcasters, the event was a 'revolution', the beginning of Germany's social and political rebirth. In 1933, it was difficult to comprehend the full consequences of this 'revolution', particularly in regard to the German-Jewish population. There was no specific staff policy developed on how to handle news regarding Germany and only vague standards to determine how to cover foreign affairs, careful at the very least not to offend foreign countries. When it came to German affairs, the BBC was naturally (and overwhelmingly) concerned with the issues of disarmament and rearmament, hostility toward the League of Nations and, by the middle of the decade, Germany's renewed sense of militarism and the potential for war. Other defining features of the Nazi regime, like the worship of race and the elevation of anti-Semitism to a state-sponsored policy, were treated with less resolve by the Talks department. What modern historians consider 'major' watersheds in relation to the Jewish situation under the Nazi regime were given no more than a cursory mention. After the infamous Nuremberg laws were passed, disenfranchising all Jews in Germany, the BBC carried the following report: 'Herr Hitler's speech in the Reichstag on September 15 caused great excitement both in Germany and abroad. The first part dealt with new internal legislation: the substituting of the swastika flag for the old Imperial colors, and further laws governing the status of the Jews. The second part raised the question of Memel.'²⁹ No details of the anti-Jewish measures were given in this report nor was this watershed considered nearly as substantive as the Memel issue, to which the rest of the brief report was devoted.

It is perhaps no surprise that the BBC offered no greater analysis or closer scrutiny. The BBC could neither comprehend the full implications of these events nor their repercussions. To grasp the complexity of German racialism posed an elusive task for any foreign contemporary witness. Indeed it is only comparatively recently that historians have been able to analyze and understand the elevation of race as the single most powerful element in the Nazi regime.³⁰ There were a fair few press and Foreign Office reports in the 1930s which touched on the issue of race totality but these were brief

²⁹ BBC Scripts, News Bulletin, 15 September 1935

³⁰ see Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*, (Cambridge, 1991)

flashes of insight which rarely made their way into broadcasts.³¹ But what of the issue of basic human rights? To what extent did the Corporation underestimate the real events of widespread public repression and persecution in their broadcasts?

Andrew Sharf's book on the British Press and the Jews living under the Nazi regime presents a similar problem confronted by historians. To what extent can the historian estimate the level of understanding which contemporaries contained of the deeper crisis? It is almost certain that any contemporary analysis could be no more than a superficial one. Nazi Germany inaugurated a political revolution and for the most part, its various features were seen as a result of this 'revolution'. It was not uncommon for broadcasters to share the presumed consternation of their listeners by expressing disbelief with some of the more odd features of the 'revolutionary' regime. 'I am not exaggerating when I say that National Socialism is to many as inspiring as a sudden discovery of religion' went one report.³² Sharf, however, is not particularly concerned with this question. His account focuses on the Nazi regime as an isolated historical period, one which contained a few basic and even obvious features. The first one was violence.³³ In virtually all contemporary accounts dealing with political repression under Nazism, broadcasters (and in Sharf's case, journalists) alluded to some form of violence associated with the particular event. An early BBC account of the anti-Jewish activity described the 1 April boycott of 1933: 'Two days [ago] there was this Nazi boycott, and you may care to hear from me about it. I spent the whole day in the streets, and although the sight of a bunch of Nazis bullying people into closing their shops at one time made me so angry that I nearly got myself arrested.'³⁴ Newspaper accounts of the boycott ran headlines such as 'Eyewitness Tells of Jew Baiting Tragedies, Nazi Mob Lynch Lawyer' and 'Hitler's War

³¹ One broadcast noted: 'Every German is to serve the group idol which in the case of Nazi Germany is the racial folk. The racial folk conception which has now swept over them [the German people] with the cosmic force of a new religion [...] It [the racial folk conception] excludes Jews from the racial group, from the folk community, on the grounds that they belong to another race, a non-Aryan race, as the Nazis put it.' BBC Scripts, H. Powys Greenwood, 'Freedom and Authority in the modern world: The race-idol of Nazi Germany', 27 February 1935

³² BBC Scripts, Vernon Bartlett, 'What I have seen in Nazi Germany', 30 March 1933

³³ Sharf writes: 'Readers of any British newspaper were left in no doubt that violence directed against certain groups of people was an integral part of the new Germany'. *The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule*, p. 74

³⁴ BBC Scripts, Vernon Bartlett, 'The week abroad: Poland rejuvenated', 6 April 1933.

on Judea. Berlin Lawyer said to have been Lynched'.³⁵ Other press accounts of Nazi violence contained vivid details. The *Manchester Guardian* wrote some days after the 1 April boycott:

A few days ago a man was sentenced to a year's imprisonment for spreading the 'false rumour' that a Jew had been hanged by Brown shirts - the 'rumour', as a matter of fact, was true: the Jew [...] was beaten by Brown Shirts and hanged by his feet, so that his head was suspended off the ground. When the Brown Shirts had finished with him he was dead.³⁶

The second obvious feature was the suspension of dissenting views. Broadcasters and journalists were aware of the extent of state control over individuals and constantly reiterated the restrictions placed on free expression. From the outset, reports dealing with the social conditions under the Nazi regime made it clear to both the listening and reading public that the state reserved the power to intrude on the private lives of individuals and monopolize state resources to carry out their aims. The tone of most of these reports implied the dubious virtue of this officially-sanctioned power. One BBC account noted:

The Government parties alone were allowed to use wireless for electioneering purposes, [and] any claim that last Sunday's ballot gave an honest expression of public opinion will be looked upon with some suspicion.

The decree issued last week suspending all the articles of the constitution relating to liberty of the individual and of the Press must increase the resentment of Munich and other state capitals against Berlin. Letters can now be opened, houses can be searched at will, and the government of any Federal State which does not carry out the decree with sufficient severity can be turned out of office.³⁷

Neither the Corporation nor press publications had to understand the nuances and subtle undertones of the 'racial state' in order to discuss the very real face of Nazi violence. In a liberal society like Britain, political, social and religious repression was seen as a very undemocratic feature of any society, particularly one like Germany which underwent a rapid transformation from a liberal-style political democracy into a totalitarian regime. Although many contemporary broadcast reports accounted for the expected repercussions of revolution, ('For years the Nazis have been taught to hate the Jews and the Socialists; it

³⁵ Sharf, p. 74. The first headline is from the *Daily Herald* of 3 April 1933 and the second from the *News of the World* of the same date.

³⁶ *Manchester Guardian* article of 8 April 1933 in Gilbert, *Exile and Return*, p. 158.

³⁷ BBC Scripts, Vernon Bartlett, 'The world and ourselves: critical days in Germany', 8 March 1933

would be unreasonable to expect that hatred to die down the moment they came into power [...] And this is [BBC's underline] a revolution') accounts of anti-Jewish persecution, as we shall see, were generally broadcast without detail and in the same context as political repression throughout the interwar 1930s.³⁸

To present a fair treatment on this subject, and determine the broadcast priority given to the anti-Jewish persecution, a certain amount of comparative information - stories dealing with German issues unrelated to anti-Semitism - must be discussed. Between (and including) January 1933 and December 1938, anti-Semitism or Jews were discussed or very briefly mentioned in at least forty broadcasts of either talks, news briefs, reviews or topical features not necessarily relating to Germany. By contrast, questions and issues relating solely to Germany featured in at least one-hundred features per annum, almost seventeen times as many as features on Jews, whether they involved German anti-Semitism or simply Jewish composers.[†] What is most compelling about BBC coverage was the way in which it presented facts and how those who reported these facts interpreted the anti-Jewish persecution. Virtually all reports on the Jewish question in Germany were concerned with either 'racial' questions or 'political' repression.

The BBC's first major attempt to report on the new regime in Germany came in the early part of 1933 with a series of broadcasts commissioned by Siepmann's Talks department, to be given by Vernon Bartlett, a respected journalist and former official at the League of Nations. Bartlett's opportunity to 'microphone round Europe' inaugurated a major innovation in the Corporation's foreign news coverage for until this time few broadcasts dealing with foreign affairs were delivered from remote locations. His earliest accounts of the Nazi regime set the tone for future broadcasts relating to both Germany and the Jewish situation in Germany. The British public were reassured about Hitler's radicalism over the airwaves for the first time in February 1933 when Bartlett declared, 'It is probably a good thing that Herr Hitler now has his chance [...] Many of his speeches on foreign affairs have created a lot of uneasiness and alarm [...] but] there is nothing like

³⁸ BBC Scripts, Bartlett, 'What I have seen...'

[†] These statistics are based on the broadcasts printed in the *Listener* between 1933 and 1938. It should be noted that the majority of 'talks' were published in the *Listener*.

responsibility for taking revolution out of a man.’³⁹ This analysis of Hitler’s appointment to the Chancellorship brought to home audiences a keen, first-hand account of the events taking place in Germany, the first reports the British listening public would hear.

The early broadcasts were interpreted solely from Bartlett’s point of view as he was the only broadcaster dealing with German issues. For most listeners, the information they received was a mixed bag of positive renewal, revolutionary violence and the imposition of order. ‘The tendency of those at present in power in Germany,’ Bartlett said in one report ‘is to claim that they have the monopoly on patriotism and that others must be compelled to their conception of it by force.’⁴⁰ He called the persecution of the Jews ‘unnecessary’ but implied its emergence as a by-product of revolution, a revolution ‘inevitable towards the recovery of German greatness and influence.’⁴¹

When the state ‘gave its blessing’ to an official Nazi boycott of Jewish-owned shops in late March 1933, Bartlett described briefly, the Jewish condition in Germany for the first time.⁴² ‘Many doctors, lawyers, artists and civil servants, and so on have been dismissed in the last few weeks for their political opinions or for their Jewish race. There is the threat of a complete anti-Jewish boycott, to start on Saturday, the result of which nobody can foresee.’⁴³ While Bartlett made it clear that anti-Jewish persecution existed, he left it unclear as to whether this was a state policy or the spontaneous action of the non-Jewish population. The British Embassy in Berlin, at the same time, warned of the potential implications of the boycott: ‘The imposition of further disabilities on the Jews must therefore be anticipated, for it is certainly Hitler’s intention to degrade and, if possible, expel the Jewish community from Germany ultimately.’⁴⁴ Bartlett’s assessment, by contrast, went to great lengths to enunciate the moderation of anti-Jewish actions and

³⁹ BBC Scripts, Vernon Bartlett, ‘Crises in three countries’, 8 February 1933

⁴⁰ BBC Scripts, Vernon Bartlett, ‘Critical days in Germany’

⁴¹ BBC Scripts, Vernon Bartlett, ‘What I have seen in the New Germany’, 30 March 1933

⁴² Noakes and Pridham, p. 461. The authors write: ‘At the end of March [1933 ...] the Government gave its blessing to an official Party boycott of Jewish shops in retaliation for the campaign abroad against Nazi atrocities.’

⁴³ BBC Scripts, Bartlett, ‘What I have seen...’

⁴⁴ PRO FO/371/16722 1933, dispatch from Sir Horace Rumbold, British ambassador to Germany, to the Foreign Office, April 1933

the atmosphere of normality in Germany despite his previous reports indicating the far-reaching reverberations of the revolution:

The persecution, I am firmly convinced, is not nearly so bad as many people in other countries believe. These exaggerated ideas have grown up abroad partly because a few people will believe anything they want to believe, partly because the suppression of the opposition press makes it difficult to check the truth of rumours, and partly because newspaper correspondents cannot be expected to remind us every time they refer to a case of persecution that the population of Germany is over sixty-five million, the very great majority of whom are living their normal lives [...] the government have now taken such strong measures to prevent persecutions that there should be no further excuse for false rumours.⁴⁵

What the listener was left with was a fairly bland assessment of events and no contextual information. The policy of anti-Semitism, which became an official state policy with Hitler's emergence as Chancellor, was presented as an attitude monopolized by peripheral figures.⁴⁶ By comparison, press accounts described the event as a 'silent pogrom' with one daily arguing that 'violent anti-Semitism is one of the few clear-cut and unmistakable features of the Nazi outlook.'⁴⁷ The fact that any boycott directed toward a specific community in Germany was not analyzed as a somewhat bizarre incident represented, as we shall see, the BBC's common approach to the events taking place in Germany. Sharf notes that although the facts were available to any press correspondent, the majority of press officials preferred to 'minimize, qualify, or speculate according to their several bents.'⁴⁸ Bartlett's feature, indeed, stressed the 'orderly, well-disciplined and not too ill-humoured,' features of the boycott.⁴⁹ These early broadcasts, and subsequent ones dealing with anti-Jewish persecution were to prove often superficial.

The election of the National Socialists, as mentioned above, was not viewed with immediate alarm within the Talks department. For many presenters, the 'new Germany' - as it so often was described - represented the return of order and stability to Germany. While most of these broadcasters might be personally opposed to this specific kind of

⁴⁵ BBC Scripts, Bartlett, 'What I have seen...'

⁴⁶ Noakes and Pridham, 460. The authors write: 'When Hitler came to power in 1933, the antisemitic aims of the NSDAP became official policy.'

⁴⁷ Sharf, *The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule*, p. 31. The first quote is from the *Manchester Guardian* of 1 April 1933; the second is from the *Leeds Mercury* of 27 March 1933.

⁴⁸ Sharf, p. 32.

⁴⁹ BBC Scripts, Bartlett, 'What I have seen...'

government, many of them were convinced that it was a perfectly sound policy for Germany. This reasoning enabled a reporter to express personal indignation toward Germany's anti-Jewish policy but also to highlight the positive changes inaugurated by the Nazi government. The practice of counter-balancing a negative portrayal of the regime with an equally positive one reflected the Corporation's obsession with objectivity. If the BBC had carved out a role for radio in the 1930s, it was to use the wireless as an object to advance mutual understanding. So while one reporter would make 'no attempt to defend Germany's anti-Jew policy' he could also express a belief in the need for 'a greater attempt in this country to understand the German point of view.'⁵⁰ The listener, therefore, while aware of the reporter's personal hostility toward the anti-Jewish policy was left with the impression that there was another, equally rational case to be made for another perspective. 'Remember we are watching the rebirth of a nation,' went one report 'a nation which has suffered greatly and is trying to evolve a new kind of civilisation.'⁵¹ While on the one hand Germany's strange anti-Jewish policy seemed an aberration, listeners were reassured that the German Reich was making positive strides toward self-improvement and this was laudable.

III. Interpreting persecution

When it came to interpreting the Jewish situation in the context of German 'renewal', the BBC believed it to be a by-product of political circumstances and not one of overt hatred. The Jewish condition was seen largely as a political problem and thus, acts of anti-Jewish persecution were given a broadcast treatment much in the same way as anti-Socialist and anti-Communist repression. While reports rarely called anti-Jewish persecution 'political', the characterization was implicit by describing the Jewish situation in the same breath as 'political' opposition. There were few reports detailing violent persecution and no single talk focused solely on the anti-Jewish persecution between 1933

⁵⁰ BBC Scripts, Sir Evelyn Wrench, 'The week abroad: Roosevelt and Hitler', 18 May 1933

⁵¹ BBC Scripts, Sir Evelyn Wrench, 'What Germany was thinking last week', 10 April 1933.

and 1938. In fact anti-Jewish persecution rarely was mentioned together with violence and there was no attempt to confront the social implications of persecution on the Jewish community. When describing the anti-Jewish boycott, for example, one reporter intimated that the repercussions of the boycott were wholly economic.⁵² Broadcasts implied that the Jewish community were only victims of economic and legal restrictions. In general, analysis of the anti-Jewish crisis failed to address the social repercussions of legal restrictions - the social marginalization of the community. This is not to say that the condition of the Jews in Germany was addressed at all. But the manner in which it was dealt with failed to give the whole picture of events (especially in comparison to accounts in certain sectors of the printed press like the *Manchester Guardian*). The tendency at Broadcasting House was to focus on issues deemed to be more important in relation to Germany. Few stories, overall among those dedicated to events in Germany, dealt with persecution of any kind. When topics relating to the persecution were discussed, there were three common approaches in presenting the information. Firstly, that Jews comprised a 'political' minority and thus, were victims of 'political' repression. Second, the approach implied that the Jewish community was partially responsible for inciting racial anti-Semitism as a result of their behavior. The third approach drew an implied distinction between victims of 'innocent' persecution (anti-Church/ anti-Christian persecution) and those who were victims as a result of their 'political' hostility toward the state (Jews, Communists, Socialists, Internationalists).⁵³

Many talks attempting to tackle the issue of state-sponsored repression left the listener with the impression that perhaps political repression was necessary to encourage stability in a time of crisis. What was not made clear, however, was the fact that Jews were not political enemies of the state but victims of racial anti-Semitism. 'What we hate is the way you can't tolerate anyone whose opinions differ from yours. The Jews, for example' argued one panelist on a youth 'cultural exchange' broadcast between British and German representatives. 'There may have been a Jewish problem, but yours is a fine

⁵² BBC Scripts, Bartlett, 'Poland rejuvenated'. The reporter notes: 'The damage done to the Jews by the boycott is terrific.'

⁵³ Bartlett described the 'unnecessary persecution of Jews, Socialists, Liberals and Internationalists.' in BBC Scripts, Bartlett, 'What I have seen...'

way of solving it' he goes on to argue.⁵⁴ This panelist had altruistic motives in denouncing the anti-Jewish persecution but his argument implied that the Jews constituted a political minority, people 'whose opinions differ'. He also acknowledged the existence of a 'Jewish problem' and implied that it was a matter which justifiably could be solved, but not by repressive and violent means. Other BBC contributors alluded to a 'Jewish problem' but almost never expanded on the definition of this 'problem'. 'I am not ignorant of the case against the Jews in Germany' went one broadcast. 'I am not ignorant of the fact that there is a Jew problem in Germany.'⁵⁵ Indeed it was common to attack Nazi repression of 'Jews [...] and all those who do not see eye to eye with them [the Nazis]' but this too left the listener with the impression that the Jews perhaps represented a 'political' interest in Germany and posed a threat to the state.⁵⁶ 'The Nazis have made the Jews, with the Social Democrats and the Communists, the scapegoat for all the miseries which led to the Revolution and their exclusion the symbol of the new unity and hope,' went another broadcast.⁵⁷

The second approach to coverage of anti-Jewish persecution often implied that Jews might be partially responsible for inspiring anti-Semitism. The Corporation implicitly bought into the belief that Jewish behavior was perhaps, at the heart of anti-Semitism. When Jewish issues were discussed, whether they related to Germany or not, the tone of the talks often implied this very idea. Often these broadcasts drew unconscious associations between racial stereotypes and anti-Semitic persecution. Like the characterization of Jews as a 'political' opposition, there was never an account stating overtly that Jews caused anti-Semitism. To draw a connection between Jewish behavior and anti-Jewish persecution was, after all, an anti-Semitic claim. 'The Jews have always been disliked for various reasons' went one report, 'some comprehensible, some not, and they were unpopular in Germany after the War.'⁵⁸ The distinction drawn between 'comprehensible' anti-Semitism and 'incomprehensible' anti-Semitism intimated that anti-

⁵⁴ BBC Scripts, Ferdinand Winkel and Stephen Taylor, 'European Exchange I: Germany', 4 December 1935

⁵⁵ BBC Scripts, John Hilton, 'More About Germany', 1 July 1936

⁵⁶ BBC Scripts, John Hilton, 'Blunders in Berlin'

⁵⁷ BBC Scripts, Powys Greenwood, 'Race-Idol...'

⁵⁸ BBC Scripts, Powys Greenwood, 'Freedom and Authority...'

Semitism *could* be comprehended and even rationalized. If anti-Semitism could be 'comprehensible' under certain circumstances, then by extension, so could anti-Semitic persecution. In Britain, it was not seen as contradictory to view oneself as 'tolerant' but at the same time anti-Semitic. 'The late Vincent d'Indy,' went one broadcast, 'was an anti-Semite of the gentle and tolerant type.'⁵⁹ It was common for broadcasts dealing with anti-Jewish persecution to recognize the existence of anti-Jewish feeling and to imply that it was not unacceptable behavior, unlike persecution, which was. 'Some people like the Jews,' went one broadcast, 'Some dislike them. Yet nobody with any claim to ordinary decency of sentiment [can] repress indignation at persecution of this kind.'⁶⁰ The implication was that one could 'dislike Jews' but still 'claim to ordinary decency' by denouncing the persecution. It was also not uncommon to mention the Jewish origins of controversial figures discussed over the air. These descriptions often had the effect of further strengthening stereotypes equating Jews with Communism, money or power. 'The latest of the great Jewish prophets, a gentleman named Marx' said George Bernard Shaw in a broadcast on Freedom in 1935.⁶¹ At a time when the political stratification between left and right reached a head, Shaw's comment was most certainly, unwelcome.

It was common to view the Jewish community as a distinctive racial group in Britain and while this did not imply hostility toward Jews, there were subtle associations drawn between Jews and 'racial characteristics'. Harold Nicolson in a broadcast describing his opposition to Zionism reflected that 'the Jews were not an agricultural race.'⁶² Often broadcasters would express admiration for the seemingly 'amazing persistence [with which] the Jews have retained their racial character and their religious ritual.'⁶³ But this 'racial character' was defined in a number of ways from one broadcaster's reference to the 'famous, though not unmistakable, Jewish nose' to more nebulous distinctions like their 'tendency to exuberant intensity which one might call Jewish'.⁶⁴ Because of these distinct and what were often viewed as enviable 'racial'

⁵⁹ BBC Scripts, Edwin Evans, 'A Jewish Nationalist in Music', 18 November 1936

⁶⁰ BBC Scripts, H. Wickham Steed, 'World Affairs', 22 June 1938

⁶¹ BBC Scripts, George Bernard Shaw, 'Freedom', 26 June 1935

⁶² BBC Scripts, Harold Nicolson, 'This past week', 11 July 1938

⁶³ BBC Scripts, Harry Nevinston, 'The Chosen People, a review', 13 May 1936

⁶⁴ BBC Scripts, Edwin Evans, 'A Jewish nationalist in music', 18 November 1936

qualities, subtle observations of a 'very obvious Jew' or their 'inherited [...] cleverness' contributed to a belief, among the listening public, that Jews made up a separate, distinctive and perhaps powerful community in Germany.⁶⁵ When commenting on the Jewish situation in Germany, one presenter noted how 'they have resisted absorption into the general mass of the population for hundreds of years.'⁶⁶

The inclusion of subtle remarks and suggestive phrases lent credibility to the associations between Jewish power and wealth. There was a tendency among broadcasters to discuss Jews and finance in the same report, sometimes alluding to 'big Jewish capitalists and financiers'.⁶⁷ It was not uncommon, also, to remark that the Jews had a particular 'cleverness, especially in finance [where] they possess a special vitality.'⁶⁸ One contemporary observer, describing the events of a Nuremberg rally noted: 'One could see big Jewish shops - especially jewelers - closed and protected with grills. Not all Jews were out of business during this week of Nazi celebration. One of the largest banks in the main street was carrying on as usual, and an enquiry over the counter elicited the reply that it was still controlled by two Jewish brothers.'⁶⁹ When analyzing a speech given by Hitler, one broadcaster failed to repudiate the claims of a 'conspiracy between critics, artists and art dealers (all Jews) against the moneyed bourgeoisie' and offered no commentary on the implications of the statement. Terms such as 'control', 'financiers' or 'racketeers', further, often entered into the lexicon of these reports dealing with Jews and the anti-Jewish crisis. While those broadcasting the events became aware of the brutality of persecution, they seem to have inferred that one kind of persecution was worse than the other.

The third approach, then, drew an implied distinction between the 'innocent' persecution of the Christians, and the 'political' persecution of the Jews. While there was never a report which drew overt distinctions between anti-Jewish persecution and anti-Christian persecution, the latter, by implication, was presented as a form of 'innocent'

⁶⁵ BBC Scripts, Bartlett, 'Indignation' and Nevinson, 'Chosen People'

⁶⁶ BBC Scripts, A.S. Russell, 'Racial problems in Europe', 13 November 1935

⁶⁷ BBC Scripts, R.W. Seton-Watson, 'What is happening in Central Europe?', 2 February 1938

⁶⁸ BBC Scripts, Nevinson, 'Chosen People'

⁶⁹ BBC Scripts, 'Spectacle at Nuremberg: English Visitors Impressions of the Congress of the Nazi Party', 30 September 1936

persecution in comparison to other forms of persecution. 'All secular opposition in Germany has now been quelled,' went one report. 'All that remains is the opposition of the Christian Churches - an opposition that is purely spiritual and [has] nothing to do with politics.'⁷⁰ Another broadcast noted, 'The [church] opposition has never been a political opposition'.⁷¹ Unlike other accounts dealing with repression, a few BBC reports dealing with the issue of persecution dealt solely with the Church crisis in Germany. Anti-Christian violence, in comparison to other forms, was characterized as 'inhuman' and the situation for confessional Christians, implied many of these reports, was far worse than that of others in Germany.⁷² One report noted: 'Julius Streicher, Germany's leading anti-Semite is proclaiming the menace of the Jew [...] The Hymn of Hate against Jewry was sung also in Munich, but anti-Catholic demonstrators were more prominent and more violent.'⁷³ When the BBC ran appeals for refugees, furthermore, they were made, for obvious reasons, to the Christian consciences of the listeners. 'It cannot be too strongly stressed,' went one appeal (after briefly describing the plight of the Jews) 'that among these victims are large numbers of persons of the Christian faith, born and bred Christians, who because of one Jewish parent or grandparent are classed as non-Aryans and suffer the same humiliation and deprivation which is afflicting those who profess the religion of Judaism.'⁷⁴ While Christian churches underwent a process of 'coercion and corruption' under the Nazi regime, the BBC failed to highlight the destruction of Jewish institutions.⁷⁵ If the regime failed to 'coerce and corrupt' Christian institutions, broadcasters gave prominence to what seemed like the only brave resistance to the Nazi regime. 'The Christian churches are now hard pressed as the last remnants of independent thought,' went one broadcast.⁷⁶ These implied distinctions drawn between Jews and others reflected the Corporation's lack of understanding regarding the Jewish community. There

⁷⁰ BBC Scripts, F.A. Voight, 'The German Purge', 7 February 1938

⁷¹ BBC WAC, Richard Crossman contributor file, Richard Crossman, 'The Church Conflict in Germany', 4 September 1934

⁷² BBC Scripts, F.A. Voight, 'The German Church dispute', 12 April 1937

⁷³ PRO FO/371/18862 1935, BBC Bulletin broadcast on 15 August 1935

⁷⁴ BBC Scripts, 'A World's Good Cause: An Appeal for Jews and Non-Aryan Christians', 8 December 1938

⁷⁵ BBC Scripts, F.A. Voight, 'Church Dispute'

⁷⁶ BBC Scripts, W.G.J. Knop, 'Five Years of Nazi Rule in Germany', 31 January 1938

were no Jews involved in the executive decision-making processes of the BBC and the impact of the Anglo-Jewish community on BBC broadcast output was minimal. The next section shall examine this last point more closely.

IV. Anglo-Jewry and broadcast appeals

The BBC's relationship with the Anglo-Jewish community is somewhat more tenuous a topic than the Corporation's broadcast coverage of Germany. There were obvious reasons why Anglo-Jewry took a keen interest in broadcasting. Their first priority was to see Jews portrayed positively in BBC broadcasts. The instability of the 1930s and the rise of fascist movements in Britain lent credence to their belief in the rise of anti-Semitism. The Board of Deputies, Anglo-Jewry's representative body in Britain, believed that negative or stereotypical portrayals of Jews on the air might strengthen existing misperceptions of Jews. The Anglo-Jewish community was also concerned about their co-religionists in Germany and how the Corporation and other news providers interpreted anti-Jewish persecution.⁷⁷ The second was that while Anglo-Jewish representatives sought to make light of the anti-Jewish persecution, they were quick to realize that any representations or reports dealing with Jews, whether negative, positive or simply informative, might only help to exacerbate anti-Semitism.⁷⁸ The BBC also held the belief that the cause of anti-Semites might be strengthened by giving too much publicity to Jewish issues and offered this as a reason for avoiding specifically 'Jewish content'. The Board did not want to appear 'pushy' by putting pressure on the Corporation to focus

⁷⁷ One member of the Jewish community sent the BBC the following letter after hearing the Corporation's broadcast account of Kristallnacht: 'Your [...] broadcast not only failed in the negative way to give information that it was desirable for German listeners to have but actually went wrong positively by conveying an erroneous impression of the re-action outside Germany to recent events in that country.' Board of Deputies of British Jews Archive (hereafter BDBJ) ACC/3121/E2/035, unidentified letter to Reith, 14 November 1938

⁷⁸ Sidney Saloman of the Board wrote to Charles Brewer of the entertainment department: 'Anything [...] which may tend to exacerbate the present situation [of anti-Semitism] should be avoided [...] It takes so little, nowadays to weigh the balance between like and dislike of the Jew.' BBC WAC R34/789/II Policy: Religion: Jewish Programmes 1938-43, Saloman to Brewer on the maintenance of Jewish programmes, 30 October 1938

more news content on the situation in Germany. This course of action, Board representatives believed, would reflect poorly on the Jewish community.

John Reith's BBC was no bastion of Jewish representation. Indeed what Jewish representation there was within the Corporation remained at the lowest levels. The Director-General, who enforced a strict Sunday broadcast policy and was himself a devout Presbyterian, had been known to ask prospective employees if they accepted the 'fundamental teachings of Jesus Christ' before accepting them for employment.⁷⁹ The Corporation, in the 1930s, reserved an average of six percent of broadcast time to religious programming, of an exclusively Christian content.⁸⁰ 'The BBC confines itself to broadcasting the Christian religion and therefore excludes Unitarianism, Judaism, Mohammedanism and many other respectable religious creeds of the world,' stated a *Radio Times* editorial in 1933.⁸¹ One program claiming Christianity to be the answer to the woes of the world elicited an angry editorial in the *Jewish Chronicle*. 'Wireless need not be made a proselytiser. But the time has come for fairness to all Faiths. We must emancipate the air.'⁸² The feeling among Jewish representatives, however, was that as long as they functioned within the framework of a Christian society, their only recourse was to monitor religious broadcasts rather than to push aggressively for Jewish religious programs. The Board lodged frequent complaints with the Corporation against programs deemed offensive to the community. In one religious broadcast, the Reverend T.H. Tardrew in his sermon stated that 'the Jews killed Jesus Christ'.⁸³ The secretary to the Board of Deputies protested to Reith on the grounds that 'a statement so prejudicial to the Jewish community should have been broadcast'.⁸⁴ The Board feared that broadcasts of this type had the 'effect of exacerbating differences and of stimulating biblical disputes on issues very remote from present day problems'.⁸⁵ When the Board did make a rare

⁷⁹ McIntyre, p. 189

⁸⁰ Briggs, vol. II, p. 52. Christian broadcasts included denominational broadcasts.

⁸¹ Quoted in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 January 1933

⁸² *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 January 1933

⁸³ BDBJ ACC/3121/E2/035, letter from the secretary of the Board of Deputies to Reith, April 1936. The original text of Tardrew's sermon does not survive but is quoted at length in an internal Board of Deputies memorandum.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, Board of Deputies

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

request for Jewish religious programming, like a broadcast by the Chief Rabbi J.A. Hertz on the festival of Purim in 1938, Richard Maconachie, then director of the Talks department, argued a program of this kind, at this moment in time 'leaves me very cold'.⁸⁶ The Board believed that by discussing Jewish festivals, a more subtle form of pro-Jewish sympathy might be aroused. It was not, most likely, the religious nature of the broadcast Maconachie objected to, but its presumed 'political' undertones.

Talks on topics of Jewish interest were handled delicately because they were seen often as constituting 'political' programming. 'As a matter of face we seldom, if ever, undertake programmes, however short, of exclusively Jewish material,' wrote the Variety director in 1935.⁸⁷ The Corporation had a fairly strict policy on 'political' content and feared that specifically Jewish programming 'would invariably be regarded as having pointed direction to Germany'.⁸⁸ On a proposed music concert by contemporary Jewish composers, one executive asked: 'Would you recommend us to ask the Colonial Office whether they think it expedient for the BBC to put on a programme of such character in the present state of affairs? It might be better to keep the idea in reserve until the Palestine problem has been at least partly solved.'⁸⁹ A handwritten note at the bottom of the memorandum stated: 'C.P. (controller of programmes) feels that the time is not ripe for a Jewish programme of this kind to be broadcast. Art is international, we know, but there is no strong positive reason for putting on the programme at this moment and a fairly strong negative one against doing it.'⁹⁰ Another proposal, in 1938, for a program on the history of Anglo-Jewry given by the Reverend James Parkes was tabled indefinitely for fear that 'the result would not [...] be either to increase international goodwill, or to help the Jewish

⁸⁶ BBC WAC R34/789/1 Policy: Religion: Jewish Programmes: 1935-38, File II, memorandum from Maconachie to Talks department on 'talks on topics of Jewish interest', 9 December 1938. Rabbi Hertz was eventually scheduled to give a broadcast in the Autumn of 1939 but the BBC pulled the plug citing scheduling conflicts. Hertz eventually was given a broadcast slot in March 1943 to speak only about the Jewish festival of Purim whilst millions of his co-religionists in Europe had already been killed.

⁸⁷ BBC WAC R34/789/1, memorandum from the variety director to the director of entertainment, 11 July 1935

⁸⁸ BBC WAC R34/789/1, memorandum to Siepmann on a Jewish broadcast service for Europe, 11 January 1939

⁸⁹ BBC WAC R34/789/1, memorandum on a proposed concert by contemporary Jewish composers, 17 September 1937

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, the controller of programmes was Cecil Graves.

cause, but more probably the reverse!’⁹¹ A concurring producer argued that ‘owing to the uncertain situation [...] regarding both Palestine and World Jewry [...] it would be better to postpone this feature at least until the autumn.’⁹² When the program was finally approved to be broadcast at the end of 1939, neither ‘the rise of Jewish nationalism’ nor the ‘return of Palestine under the terms of the Balfour Declaration’ were to be discussed.⁹³ A similar retreat from controversial content saw the Corporation replace the respected Jewish academic, Ernst Töller, as a panelist on the topic of ‘Freedom’ with one who ‘left Germany voluntarily because he did not agree with Nazi politics. He is not a Jew.’⁹⁴ Any representation of Jews, particularly in a non-entertainment capacity, was usually carefully considered among Corporation executives, particularly when the process of appeasement presented potential diplomatic complications.

The Corporation was influenced strongly by the pressure of public opinion and while there is little evidence to suggest that the public opposed persecution stories before 1938,⁹⁵ there was never any organized public pressure placed on the BBC to produce more stories about anti-Jewish persecution. The way in which items of news or entertainment relating to Jewish matters were handled and interpreted also suggests that those within the Corporation viewed these issues much in the same way as did the public. When the Jewish community made the rare attempt to press for more Jewish programming, the issue would quickly be termed a ‘Jewish problem’ and some producers would express the ‘nuisance to have to bother about the Jews.’⁹⁶ One Jewish artist, Esta Stein, who performed with the Yiddishe Suave Choir wrote to Bruce Belfrage of the Variety department in May 1938: ‘There is some very fine humour in Jewish life that would brighten the lives of our persecuted race if it would be given on the air.’ Belfrage responded: ‘At the moment there does not appear to be an immediate demand for the type

⁹¹ BBC WAC R34/789/1 File 2, memorandum on the proposal for a series entitled ‘The History of the Jews in Britain’, 8 August 1938

⁹² *ibid.*, 16 March 1939

⁹³ BBC WAC Reverend J.W. Parkes Contributor File, 1938-41, File I, internal ‘talks’ memorandum, 20 February 1939

⁹⁴ BBC WAC R51/187 Talks: Freedom 1935-36, memorandum on the suggestion of speakers for the series, 19 February 1935. Also referred to in Scannell and Cardiff, p. 159.

⁹⁵ Briggs, vol. II, p. 136

⁹⁶ BBC WAC, R34/952/5643, undated memo by talks producer Trevor Blewitt on Jewish programming

of show you specialise in.' ⁹⁷ Stein, it was noted, 'is inclined to be a bit [BBC underline] of a nuisance.' ⁹⁸ When BBC producers felt compelled to appease those members of the Jewish community calling for more programs of this 'type', the decided 'solution to this Jewish problem' would be to air the odd feature on regional broadcasts. ⁹⁹ After one request, the director of variety wrote: 'I understood it to be our policy to give [...] the freedom of the microphone at certain stated and rather rare intervals, to certain professional companies who cater for Jewish audiences.' ¹⁰⁰

Programs calling for discussion on the issue of tolerance or wide-ranging features on Jews, in addition, were usually met with hostility from BBC producers. After the events of *Kristallnacht* in 1938, which the BBC covered in one, brief news bulletin, one listener called on the BBC to produce a talk on the history of Jews in England. ¹⁰¹ By dealing with the subject of Jews in a positive way, unrelated to the events in Germany, the indirect effects might be to promote mutual understanding between Jews and non-Jews, he argued. During a time when the Jewish crisis was exposed at every level, the BBC believed that there was not a sufficient audience to whom the programs would appeal, and that it might present a problem in light of the political circumstances. 'Another call for a programme on Jewish life. I think it's really to do with Palestine again and should be refused tactfully,' wrote one producer. ¹⁰² Sidney Saloman of the Board of Deputies tried in vain to urge the Corporation to run a program on the subject of tolerance and the 'evils of persecution' in 1938. ¹⁰³ Saloman's request was ignored and by the time war broke out, the Corporation was to include no such issues among its talks.

⁹⁷ BBC WAC Esta Stein File I, 1936-62, first letter: Stein to Belfrage on a proposal for a Jewish humor sketch, 11 May 1938. second letter: Belfrage to Stein rejecting her request, 13 January 1939

⁹⁸ BBC WAC Esta Stein File, Risk of the Entertainment department on Stein, 22 September 1937

⁹⁹ BBC WAC R34/789/1, memorandum from CA Siepmann on Esta Stein, 8 June 1936

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, director of variety to controller of programmes, 12 October 1937

¹⁰¹ BBC WAC R34/789/II 1938-43, A.M. Hyamson to Maconachie, 21 December 1938

¹⁰² cited in Seaton, p. 60

¹⁰³ BBC WAC R34/789/II 1938-43, Saloman to Brewer, 30 October 1938

V. Entertainment and criticism

The Variety department spent a considerable time weighing the importance of Jewish programming in the second half of the 1930s. Until this time, Jews were often featured as caricatures, parodies of the 'East End' stereotype. The Jewish community and the Anglo-Jewish press were not unmoved by the Corporation's seeming reluctance to gear any of its programs toward a Jewish audience. In one Jewish daily, the author wrote:

There seems to be some definite objection on the part of the BBC to the inclusion of Jewish items in their broadcasts. We are repeatedly approached on the subject by some of our readers, and the attitude of the BBC in all suggestions of this nature that are made to them seems surprising [...] We do not grudge the BBC in its efforts to be amusing by putting up jokes or rhymes at the expense of the Jews, even though they are mostly silly, if not vulgar and banal, or songs crooned into the air with a foreign supposedly Jewish accent. Surely if time is found for this, time could also be found for a few genuine Jewish folk-songs, Jewish music, or a Jewish choir. Local talent has been rejected just as famous foreign Jewish artists have been turned down. We do not wish to be misunderstood. Certainly the BBC would not turn down Jascha Heifetz, Mischa Elman, Yehudi Menuhin, Moiseiwitsch or Harriet Cohen, because they are Jews.¹⁰⁴

The BBC wondered whether it should make 'any special effort to meet this [Jewish] criticism.'¹⁰⁵ An internal (and informal) inquiry in 1935 into the introduction of Jewish programming, prompted by the criticism raised in the Anglo-Jewish press, concluded that 'no special effort should be made about Jewish material'.¹⁰⁶ No example of 'strictly Jewish' material could be cited and the consensus among executives within the Variety department was that 'purely Jewish stuff is not of radio material.'¹⁰⁷ The variety director argued that 'most of their [the Jews] material is musical and consists of dreary songs which [...] have a very depressing effect upon the non-Jewish audience.'¹⁰⁸ The director of drama argued, 'I see no object in digging about for obscure Jewish dramatic material

¹⁰⁴ BBC WAC, R34/789/1, clipping from the *Jewish Daily Post*, 'Broadcasts in Yiddish', 5 July 1935

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, handwritten note on memo on Jewish broadcasts, 16 July 1935.

¹⁰⁶ BBC WAC R34/789/1 file I, memorandum from director of international programmes to the director of entertainment, 23 July 1935

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, handwritten note by Roger H. Eckersley, director of entertainment, on memorandum on Jewish broadcasts, 16 July 1935

¹⁰⁸ BBC WAC R34/789/1 file I, memorandum from variety director to the director of entertainment, 11 July 1935

simply because it is Jewish'.¹⁰⁹ After 1935, the Corporation again would consider featuring 'Jewish' programming and as discussed below, the Variety department eventually went ahead with one feature, although not without criticism.

Variety and entertainment programs which featured participants of Jewish descent were often considered 'Jewish' programming by the Variety department executives.¹¹⁰ § Any dramatic representations of Jews on the air, in addition, were interpreted through the minds of non-Jewish producers and writers. When Jewish entertainers were featured on the air, their acts often consisted of material offensive to the Jewish community. The Board of Deputies and the BBC corresponded on these very matters. 'What we [...] resent,' protested Sidney Saloman after one offending broadcast, 'is the presentation in which all the characters speak with a whine.'¹¹¹ While the Board neither encouraged nor discouraged Jewish programming, it was keen to express dissatisfaction with the promotion of Jewish stereotypes over the airwaves. Between 1936 and 1937, the Variety department made an effort to produce two entertainment programs which might appeal specifically to a Jewish audience. The department's first attempt to produce a 'Jewish' program, however, came under heavy fire from the community and as a result, subsequent Jewish programs were dropped. This light feature, entitled 'Almonds and Raisins' had 'aroused a considerable amount of resentment, conveying as it [did] a completely false impression of Jewish custom and ceremonial,' the Board protested.¹¹² People who were meant to represent Jews spoke with contrived accents and the holiest Jewish prayer, the Kol Nidre, was sung in a mocking tone. 'The ordinary Englishman of the Jewish persuasion speaks English like his neighbor does,' wrote Sidney Saloman of the Board.¹¹³ Another response from a member of the Jewish community argued: 'This type of

¹⁰⁹ BBC WAC R34/789/1, memorandum on Jewish broadcasts from the director of drama to the director of entertainment, 16 July 1935

¹¹⁰ Kenneth Wright of the Entertainment department wrote in a memo to the director of entertainment: 'In a general way, music and artists being accepted and broadcast on their merits, the "Jewish" element in musical programmes is high.' *ibid.*, 7 November 1935

§ the Variety department oversaw the Entertainment department.

¹¹¹ BBC WAC R34/789/1, Saloman to Charles Brewer of the programmes department, 21 January 1938

¹¹² *ibid.*, letter from A.G. Brotman of the Board of Deputies to Sir Stephen Tallents on the program 'Almonds and Raisins', 22 July 1937

¹¹³ *ibid.*, letter from Sidney Saloman of the Board of Deputies to Charles Brewer in the programmes department on a recent variety program, 5 October 1937

programme is not representative of modern Jewish music, of Jewish life, or of the modern Jew.' ¹¹⁴ 'I have assumed that the Jewish public like these programmes,' wrote one dumbfounded producer. ¹¹⁵ A brief inquiry into the entertainment feature found that comparatively, 'there is strict censorship on our own Gentile [music hall] scripts to keep out anything that has a biblical reference.' ¹¹⁶ When the Board, who were briefly considered to serve as an unofficial advisory body on 'Jewish' content, finally expressed its opposition to any Jewish programming whose content was not of a high quality, the Corporation chose simply to remove all Jewish programs from the air. 'If the programmes broadcast do not please the Jewish audiences, I can see no possible excuse for continuing, as the programmes themselves, as they stand, regarded as entertaining for a wider public, are definitely no good,' wrote the director of variety after receiving complaints. 'This is rather enlightening,' wrote another BBC executive in reference to the Board's decision 'and helps us to take a strong line as to the standard of material without feeling that we need to make any undue effort to put on a programme at any cost for Jewish listeners.' ¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ BBC WAC R34/789/I, Joseph Cohen, a Cambridge economics lecturer, to the BBC, 5 October 1937

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, director of variety to Cecil Graves, controller of programmes, 12 October 1937

¹¹⁶ BBC WAC R34/789/1, director of variety to controller of programmes, 25 October 1937

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, undated memo of 1937 in reference to a Board of Deputies letter

CONCLUSION

The truth is our currency.
Martin Bell

In a recent collection of his essays, Eric Hobsbawm attacks the historiographical trend of 'counterfactual' history. He writes: 'Arguments about counterfactual alternatives cannot be settled since evidence is about what happened and hypothetical situations did not happen. They belong to politics or ideology, but not to history.'¹ I note Hobsbawm's remarks because it is particularly relevant to work on the Holocaust and Nazism. The most natural question that might arise from a study of bystanders (like this one) is 'what impact would it have had, had things turned out differently?' Before I discuss the implications of this question, let us return to the arguments presented in this study. The BBC was designed to serve as an independent, state-funded broadcast institution. From its incorporation in 1927, it pursued a cautious approach to 'political' news. In 1933, when the Nazi regime came to power in Germany, the Talks department of the BBC was in its most 'experimental' stage choosing to chronicle the new regime in a relatively critical manner. When Richard Crossman reported on the anti-SA purge in 1934, the Foreign Office lodged a protest believing it to have been too 'pro-Nazi' in tone. As a result of this complaint, and at the suggestion of John Reith, the BBC developed an informal broadcast agreement with the Foreign Office. From this point forward, the BBC was to clear all manuscript talks dealing with foreign or political affairs with the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office, in turn, could make suggestions on how to change the content of talks if they were deemed 'sensitive'. The BBC was not only willing to cooperate with these suggestions but eager to 'pre-empt' any complaints by the Foreign Office. This approach contributed to the control of news content that was perhaps more cautious than that of the Foreign Office. By 1936, when the diplomatic aims of the Foreign Office became the pursuit of appeasement, the BBC shifted its broadcast policy (on an ad hoc basis) so as not to broadcast news excessively critical of Nazi Germany. Because 'negative' news about Germany was carefully controlled by the BBC, it contributed partially to a culture where full information about the anti-Jewish persecution was not broadcast. This is, however, only a partial explanation because the issue of broadcasting anti-Jewish persecution was never a contentious one between the two organizations. News of the anti-Jewish persecution was never seen as a broadcast priority by the BBC.

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London, 1997), 232

The socio-cultural phenomenon of latent anti-Semitism in Britain, exemplified by the policy of the BBC, unconsciously regulated news output about anti-Jewish persecution. It was both misrepresented and misinterpreted because it never emerged as an issue worthy of further, critical analysis.

So what does this tell us? What would have happened had the BBC treated this information in a more detailed and critical manner? Who would have benefited? Could the Corporation have helped to change the attitude people had about Jews in Britain? Could the Corporation have impacted Britain's refugee/Palestine policy? Did the BBC betray its journalistic responsibility to 'tell the whole story'? All of these questions present an elusive task for the historian. It is difficult to ignore them. To do so would be wrong. To answer them with assuredness, irresponsible. Hobsbawm warns against this trend precisely *because* it is tempting. The telling of history provides facts. Speculative history provides variables. It is very unlikely that the BBC's actions would have benefited many people had they broadcast fuller accounts of anti-Jewish persecution. The social and cultural conditions of 1930s Britain were not ripe to address and to respond to anti-Jewish persecution on a mass scale. The BBC never 'betrayed' its responsibility to 'tell the whole story' about anti-Jewish persecution because it was always an unconscious process. The tragedy of the Corporation's approach to this issue was its outright ambivalence. The only conscious 'betrayal' carried out by the BBC related to its muted coverage of German news unrelated to persecution. In this lay what John Coatman, director of the BBC North Region, referred to as a 'conspiracy of silence'. In a 1938 memorandum, Coatman wrote about the BBC's failure to fully inform the public about the issues leading up to the Munich negotiations:

In the past we have not played the part which our duty to the people of this country called upon us to play. We have, in fact, taken part in a conspiracy of silence. I am not saying for a moment that we did this willingly or even knowingly [...] In view of our history and our peculiar relationship to the Government, and also the very short time, comparatively speaking, during which we have been at work, I think even the sternest critic can hardly have expected us to have behaved differently. But now things have changed. The position of this country is infinitely more dangerous than it has ever been in modern times, and the past few weeks have invested the BBC with a new importance, given it a more vital role in the national life, and have, therefore, laid a new responsibility on us who are its

servants. This responsibility is to let the people of this country know [...] just what is happening.²

Coatman's observation leads to the next point. Exactly how does this study relate to the work carried out on the BBC and its coverage of the Holocaust? The policies of pre-war Nazi Germany provided a context for the culture in which atrocities would be carried out. There is little doubt, in my mind, that industrialized genocide was not the plan of the Nazis between 1933 and 1938. Not even the most acute contemporary observer could have developed this theory. The context, however, is what the British public never fully grasped. In a well-known 1945 account, Richard Dimbleby filed a report on the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. The story was not broadcast for over a day until producers could check the authenticity of his account. 'When they heard it,' wrote Dimbleby in his memoirs, 'some people wondered if [I] had gone off [my] head or something.'³ The reaction of BBC producers and editors to the death camps, as one recent study has shown, was neither an indication of what they did not know or what they had refused to believe all along.⁴ The mass destruction of European Jewry was an issue which many in the BBC simply chose not to think about. It was something which failed to pervade the consciousness of these individuals for various reasons. Jean Seaton has argued that the anxieties and stresses of war would not allow them to consider deeply the question of extermination. For them to do so would be a 'spiritual surrender' to Nazi brutality.⁵ As early as May 1941, however, a directive handed down to the European news service called for 'straight news items on the systematic destruction of the Jews in limited quantities and without humanitarian comment.'⁶ In other words, the BBC was not lacking in information about the genocide. The social perceptions of Jews and news relating to the Jewish community, however, remained largely unchanged from the pre-war era. With few exceptions, the framework stayed the same. The BBC placed an emphasis on certain issues and left others vague. The British public, moreover, was never 'set-up' to hear

² Scannell and Cardiff, pp. 88-89

³ Seaton, p. 56

⁴ Gabriel Milland, 'A very British kind of censorship: The BBC and the Holocaust' (unpublished essay given at the IHR 31 October 1996)

⁵ Seaton, p. 68

⁶ BBC WAC R34/655 1940-41, directive for 25 May - 31 May 1941

about wartime atrocity stories because the events which preceded mass murder were not fully developed anyway. It is little wonder that accounts of liberated death camps came as a complete shock to the majority of the British people.

Every morning, at one, BBC Radio 4 surrenders its strong medium-wave signal and lends it to the World Service until six, when the shipping forecast is read. The first words many listeners around the world hear at the top of the hour remind them that they are listening to London. The practice was begun during the Second World War to comfort European listeners. Today it is a familiar phrase which is associated with truth and fairness. As I wrote in the introduction, the conceptions of truth, of objectivity and responsibility are what the BBC means to many listeners around the world. As we have seen, it was the foundation on which the Corporation was built. And as we have also seen, these ideals were defined and carried out in a much different way during the 1930s. I began this discussion by stressing the fact that this is not intended to be a moral critique of the Reithian BBC. The BBC of the 1930s is an historical relic, and the evidence presented hitherto suggests that we cannot know how individuals inside Broadcasting House felt toward the coverage of the anti-Jewish persecution, if indeed, they considered the question at all. According to the available evidence, there was no 'question' to consider.

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- II: printed primary sources
- III: newspapers and periodicals
- IV: printed secondary sources
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- VI: journal articles
- VII: unpublished essays

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